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FROM

PRINCE RUPERT THE BUCCANEER

"MASTER LAUGHAN ENDEAVOURED TO OUT-DO THEM ALL IN DESPERATION AND VALOUR."—*Page 161.*

Prince Rupert

THE BUCCANEER

His *adventures*, set to Paper by MARY LAUGHAN, a Maid, who through affection followed him to the WEST INDIES and the SPANISH MAIN, acting as his Secretary, he deeming her a male though timid

Which account is now put into more Modern English

By

CUTCLIFFE HYNE

Author of "The Filibusters," "The Adventures of Captain Kettle," etc.

NEW YORK

Frederick A. Stokes Company

1900

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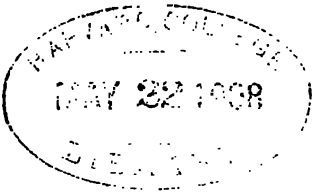

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TO

E. C. H.

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PRINCE RUPERT THE BUCCANEER

CHAPTER I

THE PAWNING OF THE FLEET

"NOT slaves, your Highness," said the Governor. "We call them *engagés* here: it's a genteeler style. The Lord General keeps us supplied."

"I'll be bound he gave them the plainer name," said Prince Rupert.

The Governor of Tortuga shrugged his shoulders. "On the bills of lading they are written as Malignants; but judging from the way he packed the last cargo, Monsieur Cromwell regards them as cattle. It is evident that he cared only to be shut of them. They were so packed that one half were dead and over the side before the ship brought up to her anchors in the harbour here. And what were left fetched but poor prices. There was a strong market too. The Spaniards had been making their raids on the hunters, and many of the *engagés* had been killed: our hunters

wanted others; they were hungry for others; but these poor rags of seaworn, scurvy-bitten humanity which offered, were hardly worth taking away to teach the craft.—Your Highness neglects the cordial."

"I am in but indifferent mood for drinking, Monsieur. It hangs in my memory that these poor rogues once fought most stoutly for me and the King. Cromwell was ever inclined to be iron-fisted with these Irish. Even when we were fighting him on level terms he hanged all that came into his hands, till he found us stringing up an equal number of his saints by way of reprisal. But now he has the kingdom all to himself, I suppose he can ride his own gait. But it is sad, Monsieur D'Ogeron, detestably sad. Irish though they were, these men fought well for the Cause."

The Governor of Tortuga emptied his goblet and looked thoughtfully at its silver rim. "But I did not say they were Irish, *mon prince*. Four Irish kernes there were on the ship's manifest, but the scurvy took them, and they went overside before reaching here."

"Scots then?"

"There is one outlandish fellow who might be a Scot, or a Yorkshireman, or a Russian, or something like that. But no man could speak his lingo, and none would bid for him at the sale.

You may have him as a present if you care, and if perchance he can be found anywhere alive on the island. No, your Highness, this consignment is all English; drafted from foot, horse, and guns: and a rarely sought-after lot they would have been, if whole. From accounts, they must have been all tried fighting men, and many had the advantage of being under your own distinguished command.—Your Highness, I beseech you shirk not the cordial. This climate creates a pleasing thirst, which we ought to be thankful for. The jack stands at your elbow."

Prince Rupert looked out over the harbour, and the black ships, at the blue waters of the Carib sea beyond. "My poor fellows," he said, "my glorious soldiers, your loyalty has cost you dear."

"It is the fortune of war," said D'Ogeron, sipping his goblet. "A fighting man must be ready to take what befalls. Our turn may come to-morrow."

"I am ready, Monsieur, to take my chances. It is not on my conscience that I ever avoided them."

"Your Highness is a philosopher, and I take it your officers are the same. Yesterday they rode with you boot to boot in the field, ate with you on the same lawn, spoke with you in council

across the same drum-head. To-day they would be happy if they could be your lackeys. But the chance is not open to them; they are lackeys to the buccaneers."

Prince Rupert started to his feet. "Officers, did you say?"

"Just officers. The great Monsieur Cromwell has but wasteful and uncommercial ways of conducting a war. He captures a gentle and gallant officer; he does not ask if the poor man desires to be put up to ransom, but just claps the irons on him, and writes him for the next shipment to these West Indies, as though he were a common pikeman." The Governor toyed with his goblet and sighed regretfully—"'Twas a sheer waste of good hard money."

"And you?"

"We kept to the Lord General's classification, and sold gentle officer, and rude common soldier on the same footing. There was no other way. We were too far off your England here to treat profitably for ransom. Besides, the estates of most were wasted during the war, and what was left lay in Monsieur Cromwell's hands."

"All the gentlemen of England are beggared. They sent their plate to the King's mint to be coined for the troops' pay; they pawned their lands; and now they are sent to be butcher-boys

to horny-handed cow-killers. I think you have dealt harshly, Monsieur D'Ogeron."

"It was your war," said the Governor good-humouredly, "not mine; and the harshness of it was out of my hands. The men were sent here, and I dealt with them in the most profitable way. If it would have paid me to weed out the officers, I should have done it. As it didn't, I e'en let them stay herded in with the rest."

"But surely, Monsieur, you must have some regard for gentle blood?"

"Mighty little, *mon prince*, mighty little. I had it once in the old days, in France; but I lost it out here. It's not in fashion. A quick eye and a lusty arm we value in Tortuga and Hispaniola more than all the titles a king could bestow. Gentility will not fill the belly here, neither will it ward off the Spaniards, neither will it despoil them of their ill-got treasure to provide the wherewithal for an honest carouse. What we value most is a little coterie of Brethren of the Coast sailing in with a deep fat ship, with their numbers few and their appetites whetted. To those we are ready to bow, as we did once in the old countries to knights and belted earls—till, that is, they have spent their gains."

"And then?"

"Why, then, *mon prince*, we are apt to grow un-

civil till we see their sterns again as they go off to search the seas for more. Oh, I tell you, it's a different life here from the old one at home; and a rustling blade, if he can contrive to remain alive, soon makes his way to the top, be he gentle, or be he mere whelp of a seaport drab."

"You state your policy with clearness. This is not known in France, and there, I make bold to say, Monsieur, it would not be liked."

The Governor drank deeply. "Here's to France," quoth he, "and may she always stay a long way off! I'm my own master here, and have a strong place and a lusty following."

"Stronger places have been taken," said the Prince.

"Not if they were snugly guarded," said D'Ogeron. "I use my precautions. There are two entrances to this harbour, but only one channel. There are many bays, but only one anchorage. Your ships are in it now; my batteries command them."

"Monsieur," said Rupert stiffly, "do you distrust me?"

"Except for my own rogues, and you are not one of them——"

"Thank God!"

"Except for my own rogues, I trust no one."

"Monsieur," said Rupert, "I am not in the

habit of having my word doubted. I have had the honour to inform you before that I came in peace."

"So have done others, and yet I have seen them bubble out with war when it suited their purpose."

"Monsieur, you may have your own individual code of honour in these barbarous islands, but I still preserve mine. You have seen fit to put in question my honesty. I must ask you to call back your words, or stand by the consequences."

The Governor winked a vinous eye. "You don't catch me fighting a duel," said he. "The honour of the thing we may leave out of the question: we don't deal in it here. And beyond that, I have all to lose and nothing to gain."

"Monsieur," said the Prince, "you have your sword, and I have mine. I can force you either to fight or apologise."

The Governor wagged his goblet slowly. "Neither one nor the other," said he. "Alphonse," he cried, raising his voice, "haul across that curtain."

There was a scuffle of feet. A piece of drapery that seemed to hide the wall behind the Prince's chair clattered back on its rings, and showed another room, long, narrow, and dusky. In it at the farther end was a demi-bombarde, a small

wide-mouthed piece on a gun carriage, with a man standing beside its breech holding a lighted match over the touch-hole.

The Prince turned sharply to look, and then slewed round to the table again. "It covers me well, but I have known a single shot to miss."

"But not a bag of musket balls, *mon prince*, with a small charge behind them," said the Frenchman politely.

"They would be safer," said Rupert. "Yes, Monsieur, it is a pretty trap, but to me it scarcely seems one that a gentleman would set for a guest."

D'Ogeron shrugged his shoulders. "It contents me," he said, reaching for the black-jack. "I have ceased to be a gentleman. I am Governor of Tortuga."

"If I cannot compel you just now to fight me for your discourtesy," said Rupert, "at least I will not drink with you." And he spilled his liquor on the floor.

"Every man to his humour," said D'Ogeron. "The jack's half full yet, but I'm not averse to doing double duty. This sangoree puts heart in a man. Now touching these *engagés* we started from: there is a way open by which you can serve them quite to their fancy. All who are left, that is, for I make no doubt that some have not sur-

vived. Newcomers are apt to be full of vexatious faults, and the cow-killers are not wont to be lenient when their convenience is injured. Give out that you are here with money, and ready to buy, and within a month I'll have all of them brought here to look at, with their prices written in plain figures. Say the word, *mon prince*, and I'll send out news this very day."

It irked Prince Rupert to deal with this man, it irked him to sit in the same room with such a fellow; but the woes of those that had fought by his side cried aloud for relief, so he swallowed back his nausea and spoke him civilly. Besides, if the Governor chose to pocket the affronts and go on sipping his sangoree, it was the Governor's affair. So the Prince said that he was ready to buy back the liberty of those officers who had served his late majesty King Charles in the wars, and was prepared to remain in Tortuga harbour with his three ships till these were brought in.

"Well and good," said D'Ogeron. "But I must warn your Highness that prices will rule high. When your very excellent friends were sold here, newly out of the ship, being raw with wounds, and galled with their shackles, and damaged with scurvy, they went cheap. But since then they have been in training as hunters, and porters of meat, and makers of bucan, and dressers of hide,

and so they have acquired value as handicrafts-men. Moreover, when ransom is spoken of, it is always our custom to acquire new interest in a prisoner. You take me?"

"I do. Had I one tenth of your commercial power, Monsieur, the King, my master, for whom I came out here to glean the seas, could keep a richer court at the Hague."

The Governor leaned across the table and stared. "Do I hear you say you are working for Charles II.?"

"Certainly. I am his servant since his late Majesty's murder. His kingdom for the nonce is unhappily in the hands of others, and with it the natural revenues. A king must have a court; a court needs money; I sail the seas to win that money: the thing is simple."

Monsieur D'Ogeron hit the table. "The thing is unheard of," he cried. "Loyalty is a home-growth which does not bear transporting across the seas. In France, in the old days, I was the king's man—I forget what king's. I left France full of that loyalty, and for a while it lasted. But when my ship ran into the trade winds, it began to ooze from me, and when I got set down here, in these islands of the Caribbean, there was but a dim memory of that loyalty left. France is so many a weary league away, that the King's

shadow cannot reach across the seas. For a while I missed it; for a while there was a blank in my life. And then I found another master: a master whom I could always admire and strive for; a master whose every action interested me, whose every woe was mine; and him I have served this many years with infinite zest and appetite. Never had man a master he wished to serve so well."

"May I hear his name?" the Prince asked.

The Governor turned to a silver mirror which hung against the wall, and lifted his goblet.

"I drink to him," he said, "with all heartiness. His name is Camille Baptiste D'Ogeron, patron of the buccaneers."

"And skimmer of their gains?"

"Skimmer of their gains, most certainly, *mon prince*, or why Governor of Tortuga? What am I else but a king? I have no hollow pomp about my court, it is true, but I could have it if I chose to pay. I could have drums beat in my path when I went abroad, and powder burned upon my saint's day. I could have courtiers in silken robes and golden chains, and a palace with forty rooms instead of four. But I take only what suits my whim. My visitors come in tarry breeks or the bloodied shirts of cow-hunters. My attendants can make a roast, or brew a bowl, or slit

a throat with equal glibness. My enemies, when they call, leave behind them their heads on the spikes above the gateway. And I have also the delicate joys of domesticity. Though I have been widowed these nine times, I married a new wife brought in by one of the ships only the other day, and already she adores me."

Prince Rupert sighed. "I can conceive," he said, "that the situation would not be intolerable for some men. There is a certain relish in robbing the Spaniard."

"More for you, *mon prince*, than for me. They are Pope's men, and I was a Pope's man bred myself. You were always Protestant."

"I glory in it," said Rupert fervently, "though it has made me a ruined fellow from my birth up."

"There you are, then," said the Governor. "Take your revenge, which is here ready to your hand, and grow rich at one and the same time."

"I shall take my revenge," said the Prince quietly, "and I shall take revenge for others also. But it is my King who will have the riches."

"Yet, if it could be otherwise," said the Frenchman musingly: "if you would follow what is in the atmosphere out here, and be content to fight for your own hand, what a glorious future there would be before you! There are

with you three ships in harbour now: a very tolerable commencement. You could take them up a creek to careen, and clean them from the weeds of the voyage, and re-set-up your rigging, and get all put a-tauto. You have pretty enough crews on board already. I can get you also those of your late soldiers whom Monsieur Cromwell sent me, and who will be none the worse for their short apprenticeship with the buccaneers. There are hundreds of the buccaneers themselves that would join in such an enterprise, and I also could lend a couple of well-found ships to assist it."

"And what is this enterprise?"

"Seize every plate ship that's sent home to Spain. Sack every city on the Main in its turn, squeeze out all the gold, and sail away and leave its people to spin more."

"You propose I should do this as your lieutenant?"

"That sticks in your gizzard, eh, *mon prince?* But, as it chanced, I was not going to make any such suggestion. I never aspire to having men of your calibre as my subjects. They would take too much looking after, and I have no wish to find one from below climbing up and trampling on me, and becoming chief in my place. This governorship has been too hard to get, and is too snug a property to jeopardise for the mere am-

bition of having Rupert Palatine for a mere week or so as my dutiful lieutenant." And Monsieur D'Ogeron winked pleasantly. "No, *mon prince*, go and seize an island for yourself, and set up a government, and we will call ourselves allies. We will form a buccaneer kingdom with a dual head, and there will be no limit to our prosperity. Look at the crop there is at hand: wine, women, meat, corn, silks, pearls and gold in all abundance. All the strong men will flock to us and help in the taking. The Spanish power will melt away like sand cliffs before a sea."

Prince Rupert thrust back his chair from the table and smote the arm with his fist. "Have done, Monsieur!" he said. "It is against my honour that I should listen to you more. I came out here as a King's man, and if life remains to me, it will be as his man that I go back."

"But," said the Governor, with a puzzled brow, "your King's Cause is distant; it is weak; it is nearly on the ground; it is doubtful if it ever pulls round again. Nay, your Highness, by this time, for aught you know, the Second Charles has followed the way of his father, and there is no Cause left."

"Then I shall build it up again and fight for it. In Europe, Monsieur, we do not esteem a man any the less honourable because he keeps

his fidelity to a Cause that is for the moment drooping."

"Well," said Monsieur D'Ogeron, "I am thankful that I have left Europe behind, with those old unpracticable ideas." He leaned back in his chair and stretched. Then he laughed craftily, and went on with his speech. "As it seems, then, we cannot trade over this idea of a buccaneer kingdom, your Highness, let us go back to the question of ransoming these *engagés*. You are prepared to pay good hard money down?"

The Prince frowned. "For a gentleman, Monsieur, you are unpleasantly commercial."

"Your Highness rather wearies me," said the Governor, with a whimsical shrug. "Gentility I have dropped, as being quite unprofitable; and as for keenness over a bargain, why, there I could skin a Jew; so now you have a fair and final warning."

"I have no money at present."

"I did not suppose you had. Ships which sail from here to the Old World are ofttimes rich; but ships coming here, never. Since history began, they have always been barren and empty —or why else should they come?"

"I will make payments, Monsieur, out of the first prizes which come into my hands."

"I hear your Highness say it. But—Tortuga is not Europe, and we give mighty little credit here. If you were known to be fighting for your own hand, it might be different. But when you openly say you are merely an admiral of some king across the water, you speak beyond our simple minds altogether. I answer not only for myself: I answer for the whole community. You must offer some other scheme, *mon prince*, or your friends must stay on as *engagés* and work out their time. Come, think it out. I do not wish to hurry you."

Prince Rupert sat with his chin in his fingers and pondered deeply, but no schemes came to him. It irked him terribly to think that the men who had fought by his side during all the battles of the war should be left unrescued in this horrible servitude, whilst he was at hand with the will to set them free, and only lacking of the bare means. And if fighting would have done the deed, the Prince would have recked little of the odds against him. But though he captured all Tortuga, with its forts and batteries, and killed the Governor, yet he would be no more forward in his design. For those he wished to relieve were scattered in ones and twos far over the Savannahs of Hispaniola across the strait, and nothing but the good-will of Monsieur

D'Ogeron could make the buccaneers, their masters, bring them in.

The Governor at the end of the table smoked tobacco and sipped his sangoree. He seemed quite contented, and perhaps a little drowsy.

Prince Rupert stood up, and began to walk to and fro across the chamber, as was his wont when thinking deeply. But scarcely had he left his chair, when the roar of an explosion shook the place, and the chamber was filled with smoke, and the chair itself and a part of the table beyond were blown to the smallest of splinters.

But at the head of the table the Governor sat unmoved, and, as it seemed, unstartled; and presently he began to laugh. "'Fore God," he said, "that was a sleepy rogue of a cannonier. Has your Highness guessed what happened?"

"No," said the Prince. "Your efforts at hospitality are somewhat beyond me."

"Why, the man with the lighted match in his hand has been growing more and more drowsy, and nodding and nodding, till at last his hand drooped down over the priming. When the piece fired I chanced to look round, and saw him waken and start, as though he had been hit himself. 'Twas a most comic sight."

"Through his carelessness I have had a most narrow escape."

"But you did escape," said the Governor. "And the damage done to the chair and table I will forgive him for the amusement he afforded me."

"I must request you, Monsieur," said the Prince, "to order this man a flogging."

The Governor was all affability. "*Mon prince*," quoth he, "if it pleases you, he shall be flogged first and hanged afterwards. Or would you prefer that he should have his wakefulness improved by a generous taste of the rack? You have had a start. I had forgot you were newly from Europe and would care for these things. We think little enough of such small humours here, so long as we are not hurt. But you are fresh from the Old World, and my man shall pay dearly enough for his indiscretion."

The Prince frowned. "I wonder, Monsieur," he said, "that you do not punish the man as taking away your only guard over me."

This time Monsieur D'Ogeron laughed outright. "*Mon prince*," he said, "you have small idea of the completeness of my defences. Were it my will, I could have you safe in an unbreakable prison before another second had passed."

"I do not take you, Monsieur."

The Governor rubbed his hands appreciatively. "My dungeons," he said, "are beneath this

chamber, rock-hewn, deep and vastly unpleasant. The floor on which we stand is so ingeniously contrived that at will any portion of it can be made to give way, and drop an inconvenient person into safety below. I have a trusty knave at hand attending on the bolts."

"Who is probably asleep, like your other fellow."

The Governor frowned. "I do not think so, your Highness. But we will soon see. I might call your attention to the embrasure of the window behind you. In case other foothold goes, it will afford you a scanty seat." Then, lifting his voice, he cried loudly for "Jean Paul!"

On the instant a great flap of the floor beneath the Prince's feet swung downwards, and had not Rupert been warned, there is not a doubt but that he would have been shot helplessly through the gap into the prison beneath. But as it was, with a scramble he reached the ledge of the window, and sat there cursing aloud at Tortuga and all the monkeys and the monkeyish tricks it contained.

It was plain the Governor wished to laugh—for when half drunk he was a merry enough ruffian—but he saw the Prince's rage and choked back his mirth. "Nay, your Highness," he said, "you brought it on yourself by doubting whether

my man Jean Paul stayed awake. I have known all my fellows long. Alphonse drowses sometimes when the heat is great and he has liquor in him, but, Jean Paul never. That is why I have set Jean Paul over the strings which govern the bolts, and he has never failed me, and never pulled the wrong string. And it is no light business to keep the tally of them either, for there is a separate string for every square fathom of the floor."

"You keep a most delicate care of your health, Monsieur."

"It is necessary," said the Governor, with a shrug. "I have some queer callers. Men in these seas want many things, and when they cannot get them for the asking, they are not averse to using violence if they think it will succeed. I dare lay a wager, *mon prince*, that if you saw those late officers of yours, which Monsieur Cromwell sent me, standing by the harbour side, you would not think twice about clapping them on board and carrying them to sea without a piastre of recompense?"

"It would be my bare duty to gentlemen who have been my very faithful comrades."

"And your King's servants. How far would his present Majesty go towards ransoming these unlucky soldiers?"

"He would go far, Monsieur. I have no commission from him to speak upon the matter: I could have no commission, seeing that his Majesty knew no more than I that Cromwell has sent unfortunate cavaliers to be enslaved in these savage seas; but I take it upon myself to say that his Majesty would sacrifice much to see them relieved."

"Well," said the Governor, "if he sends out money, I will see the matter most circumspectly attended to."

"He can send out no money," said Rupert gloomily. "His Majesty has nothing save for what I earn for him."

The Governor spread his hands. "Then what can you expect? There is nothing for it but to let your good friends continue their employment, unless——"

"Unless what, Monsieur?"

The Governor dropped his *insouciance* and stood to his feet. The drink seemed to warm into life within him. The Prince was still sitting absurdly enough in the window embrasure, with the fallen trap yawning beneath his feet. D'Ogeron strode up and faced him across the gap. "Give me the services of your fleet for six short months," he cried, "and the men shall be yours. We will send the ships away to-morrow to careen. I will des-

patch messengers, and these cavaliers of yours shall join them before they are cleaned. Then they shall sail away to harry a Spanish town on the Main, and their earnings during those six months shall count for all the ransom."

"It is a bargain," Rupert said. "The King will forgive my alienating his revenues for the sake of these cavaliers who have served him so well. So, Monsieur, I sell myself into the service of the Governor of Tortuga for six desperate months."

"Stay a moment," said the Frenchman. "I made no design on your Highness's utility. It is part of my design that the fleet should sail under an officer of my own, and that your Highness should stay on here, and accept my poor hospitality."

"And for why, Monsieur? Do you honour me by doubting my capacity as an admiral?"

"By no means. I have the highest opinion of your fighting genius, *mon prince*. But I would like to ensure that the fleet, after glutting itself with spoil on the Spanish Main, called back in this harbour here, and did not sail direct to Helveotsluys or some other port of Holland."

"So, Monsieur, you doubt my poor honesty? You do well to put a barrier between us, for this is a killing matter."

"I have learned to doubt everybody, your Highness; but I doubt you doubly because of your loyalty to this king without a kingdom, by whom you have been sent out a-foraging. Once you and your cavaliers had the gold aboard and under hatches, it might come to your memories that this king of yours was poor, and wanted immediate nourishment, and that Monsieur de Tortuga could bear to have his account settled on a later day. You take me?"

"I cannot bargain with you," said Rupert violently. "I will not be separated from my fleet. But if hard necessity makes me desert these unfortunate cavaliers now, be assured that I do not forget them. And when opportunity arrives, and I come back to rescue them, look to yourself, Monsieur."

"You may trust me to do it," said the Frenchman. "I am always ready to receive my visitors fittingly. That is why I remain Governor of Tortuga. Well, your Highness, for the present negotiations seem at an end between us. To-morrow I suppose you will buy what food you have moneys for, and draw anchor, and be off outside towards the Main, to set about your earnings. But for the present I have a kindliness towards you, although in truth you have yielded me but very slender deference, and I would e'en

let you have a passing look at these good comrades from whom you have been so cruelly parted."

"What, you have them here, then?"

"Some of them are coming to the Island now with their produce. Looking over your Highness's shoulder through the window, I saw three canoe-loads of them disappear behind the point. If it please you to take a short promenade in my company, you can watch their march when they land."

"Monsieur," said the Prince, "I accept your condescension. But first you must make me a pathway across this gap. I cannot fly."

"That can soon be done," said the Governor. He put a finger through his lips and whistled shrilly. A man stepped into the room from behind a curtain. "Jean Paul," said the Governor, "the drawbridge." The man lugged a plank from beneath the table, threw it across the space in the flooring, and assisted the Prince to cross. The Governor himself handed his walking-cane and plumed hat, and together they passed out of the chamber, Jean Paul and Alphonse following, with hands upon their pistols.

They walked leisurely through the defences of the castle, for Monsieur D'Ogeron was by no means loth to advertise his strength, and arm in

arm they went out through the massive gateway, with its decoration of shrivelled heads, once worn by Monsieur D'Ogeron's enemies. They paced with gentle gait along the sun-dried path beyond, the Prince discoursing on philosophy, and engraving, and the gentler sciences, according to his wont, as though he had no thought beyond, and the Governor speaking of the fellows they passed, and the quantity of gold each in his time had wrested from the Spaniards. The Governor had but one thought to his head; but the Prince, whatever his thoughts might be, had always elegant words on other matters with which to cloak them.

The Prince used his eyes keenly as he walked, but could discover little of that lavish wealth of which the Governor spoke so glibly. The wine shops were the most considerable buildings in the place, and these were mere thatched sheds without walls. Litter and squalor and waste lay everywhere. Rich silks and other merchandise were trodden down in the kennel along with garbage and filth. There was no laden ship in just then, with a crew to be fleeced, and the women of the place hung about in disconsolate knots bewailing their draggled finery. The dwelling-houses were mere hovels of mud and leaves: the only warehouse for goods was the open beach.

The Governor must have read the Prince's glance, for he shrugged an apology. "You see us," he said, "in a state of *ennui*. But let one shipload of plunder come from the Main, and another of wines arrive from Bordeaux, and the place is a babel of life and carousal. Buccaneers returned from the foray are the merriest creatures imaginable. They will have none round them that are not cheerful. They set their casks of rum abroach in the path, and swear to pistol all who will not drink with them. They strut in clothes that would look fine on an emperor. They dice for black-jacks full of fair gold coin. They love the ladies with a vehemence that only seamen can command. They sing, they shout, they scream, they fight, and they scatter their plunder with a free-handedness that is more than glorious. They count it as shame if they have a piece-of-eight remaining to them after a week ashore, and then away they go to harry the seas for more. Oh, 'tis a rustling time here in Tortuga when we have a laden ship in from the harvesting; and a Governor, who must needs drink level with the best, needs a hard head to make full use of his opportunities."

The Prince listened with a courteous bow, and picked his way with niceness amongst the squalors of the path; and presently they reached the

outskirts of the sheds and the hovels, and walked between walls of tropical foliage that arched with delicate tracery into a graceful roof far above their heads. Gorgeous butterflies danced before their path, and flowers administered to them of their choicest scents. They came into an open glade hung with beauty, and the Prince exclaimed that he had been led into fairyland.

"Well," said the Governor, with a laugh, "I hope your Highness will be contented with the fairies, for here they come."

A man appeared from a path at the farther side of the glade, and after him another, and then others. They trod with heaviness, being ponderously laden; and the leader, tearing a switch from a tree, stepped on one side and beat the others lustily as they passed him.

"*Dépêchez-vous!*" he screamed. "Hurry, you slow-footed dogs!" And the train with infinite weariness shuffled along at a quicker gait.

They were all dressed in rude thigh-boots of raw cowhide, with loose shirts on their upper bodies stained purple with constant bloodyings. They wore shaggy beards, and shaggy uncut hair, full of sticks and refuse. Their faces and arms were puffed with insect-bites. They were unspeakably disgustful to look upon, and yet the Prince regarded them with a softening eye.

Every third or fourth man was armed with a *machete* which dangled against his thigh, and a long-stocked buccaneering piece which he bore in his hand; and with his spare hand he carried a switch and belaboured the others. It was only the unarmed men who bore the burdens—one a great parcel of crackling hides, another a skinful of tallow, another a package of bucaned cow-meat, another a hog bucaned whole, and so on; and these were the *engagés*, the slaves for three years of the acknowledged buccaneers who were with the train, and the slaves of others who remained behind in Hispaniola to continue the hunting.

They marched across the glade, like men who had lost all interest in life, each watching the heels of the one preceding; and Rupert devoured them with his eyes. Then one tall fellow stumbled over a fallen bough, and sent his burden flying, and his owner fell upon him with a very ecstasy of switching, and the Prince stepped out and bade the buccaneer desist. He did so sulkily enough, and the *engagé* scrambled to his feet and resumed his pack. He was a huge red-haired man, with a livid scar across his eyebrows.

"By God!" cried the Prince, "I should know that scar."

The fellow looked up. "The Prince!" he said

"THEY MARCHED . . . . LIKE MEN WHO HAD LOST ALL INTEREST IN LIFE."
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—"Prince Rupert! Has your Highness come in for misfortune too?"

"My share. You carried the name of Coghill, if I do not disremember?"

"Coghill," said the fellow, "and rode with your Highness through many a noisy day."

"Especially at Edgehill, lad, and earned that wipe across the face by saving my poor life."

"I did not wish to recall the debt, your Highness," said the fellow, "being in this plight. It was General Fairfax that give it me. He'd a lusty arm, and could sit a horse."

The Prince wrung his hands. "I would I could serve you, lad," he said, "but I am in sorry plight myself, and the King is as bad."

"Well," said the fellow, with a sigh, "I must make shift to serve my time. I'm tough, and a common soldier looks to taking what befalls. But for officers that was delicate nurtured, it is different. This life kills them off like flies."

The Prince groaned. "I am powerless, lad," he said—"powerless."

"If your Highness could stretch a point," the fellow persisted, "it would be good for the Colonel. He will die else."

"What colonel?"

"Sir John Merivale,—who other? Has not your Highness picked him out?" The man

turned round. "Oh, there he is, just coming into the open. He has seen much misfortune since Old Noll took him at Coventry, and sent him over seas."

Prince Rupert followed the trooper's glance. A gray-haired old man, the last of the train, was staggering into the clearing under a horrible burden. He had been apportioned off to carry a side of fresh beef, killed that very morning, and was bearing it, buccaneer fashion, with his head stuck through a hole in the centre. His knees bent under him with the weight, his frail hands gripped feebly at the moist edges of the joint, but his proud old back was as straight as ever it had been in the days when he sat in his saddle at the head of the King's guards; and when a fellow *engagé* helped him lower his dripping burden to the ground, he thanked the man with the easy courtesy of a superior.

The Prince stepped out to greet him. "Sir John," he cried, "it grieves me terribly to see you in this shocking plight."

"Ah, Prince," the old man said, "you have caught me somewhat unawares, and my present service is at times none of the most delicate. How goes the Cause? We get sadly behind the times here both in news and attire." And with that he incontinently fell down and fainted.

Prince Rupert turned to the Governor. "Monsieur D'Ogeron," he said gravely, "I surrender. For six months the fleet is yours on the conditions you offered. Whether I do right or whether I do wrong is another matter, and when the time comes I shall answer for it to the King, my master. But in the meantime I am Rupert Palatine, and I cannot live on to see officers of mine condemned to a plight like this. The opportunity is yours, and you make your gains."

"*Mon prince*," said the Governor delightedly, "I honour your charity. We will have a great time together here in Tortuga drinking success to the fleet whilst it is away."

CHAPTER II

THE ADMISSION TO THE BROTHERHOOD

HERE, then, Prince Rupert was left, a guest of Monsieur D'Ogeron, the Governor of Tortuga, a man whom he found distasteful when sober and disgusting when drunk, a man with appetites only for gold-getting and carousals, frankly devoid of honour, and caring nothing for philosophy, engravings, or any of the more humane arts and sciences.

His Highness had with him his secretary, whom he knew as Stephen Laughan (but who was a maid disguised in man's attire), and his only other attendant was a negro, a creature of Monsieur D'Ogeron's. And here it seemed he was destined to endure six months, till his ships should be again out of pawn, and he was free once more to harry the Spanish seas at the head of a stout command.

If Monsieur D'Ogeron's castle of the cliff was unappetising, the squalid settlement at the head of the harbour was more so. Twice within the first three weeks, ships of the buccaneers sailed in laden with plunder from the Main, and there were

some very horrid scenes of debauchery. These men knew no such thing as moderation; lavishness was their sole ideal; and he who could riot away the gains of a year in the carouse of a night was deemed to have the prettiest manners imaginable. The squalid town and its people was a mere nest of harpies, and no one knew this better than the buccaneers themselves. Monsieur D'Ogeron they openly addressed as Skin-the-Pike; the tavern-keepers they treated as though they had been Guinea blacks; but the hussies who met them with their painted smiles on the beach, and who openly flouted them the moment their pockets were drained, were a lure the rude fellows could never resist. They kissed these women, and dandled them on their knees; they lavished their wealth upon them, and sometimes beat them, and ofttimes fought for them; but never did they seem to tire of their vulgar charms.

To the onlooker, the imbecility of the buccaneers in this matter was as marvellous as it was unpleasant; and it was plain to see that the machinations of the hussies (though it cannot be denied that some had beauty) were as distasteful to Prince Rupert as they were to his humble secretary and companion. They accosted them both on their walks abroad, gibing at the secretary's prim set face. But though his Highness

gave them badinage for badinage, as was always his wont with women of whatever condition, they got nothing from him but pretty words gently spiced with mockery.

It was however an orgie in the Governor's castle that put a final term to their stay in Tortuga. A captured ship came in, laden deep with gold and merchandise. A week before it had been manned by seventy Spaniards, and of these twenty-three remained alive. It had been captured by a mere handful of buccaneers who had sailed after it in an open canoe, and these strutted about the decks arrayed in all manner of uncouth finery, whilst their prisoners, half-stripped, attended to the working of the vessel. They brought to an anchor, drove their prisoners into an empty hold, and clapped hatches over them; and then stepped into their boat and rowed to the muddy beach. According to their custom they had made division of the coin on board, and each man came ashore with a canvas bucket full of pieces-of-eight for his day's expenses.

They rowed to the rim of the harbour, singing, and the harpies came down on to the littered beach to meet them. From the castle above we saw them form procession, each with a couple of the hussies on his arms, and fiddlers scraping lustily in the van. There was value enough in the

clothes of them to have graced a king's court; gold lace was the only braid; and very uncouthly it sat upon the men, and very vilely upon the hussies. The fiddles squeaked, a fife shrilled, and a couple of side-drums rattled bravely, and away they went with a fine preparatory uproar to the wine shops.

From his chamber in the castle Monsieur D'Ogeron heard the landing, and commenced a bustle of preparation. A feast was to be made ready, of the best, and the buccaneers and all those of the townspeople they chose to bring with them were bidden to it; and after the more solid part of the feast had been despatched, dice boxes were to be brought forward, so that the Governor, who was well skilled in play, might make his guests pay for their entertainment.

Monsieur D'Ogeron gave the orders to his negro cooks and stewards, posted armed guards in convenient niches so that his guests could be handily shot down if they resented any part of the carousal, and then, with his two armed body-servants, Alphonse and Jean Paul, betook himself to the squalid town below, where he was received with shouts, which were not entirely those of compliment.

For three hours he was swallowed up out of vision polite, and then once more reappeared on

the road which led to the castle, arm in arm with the chief of the buccaneers, with a procession fifty strong bellowing choruses at their heels. They lurched up the winding pathways, stamped through the grim gateway with its decoration of shrivelled heads, came up the ladders which gave the only entrance from the courtyard, and clattered into the long low hall of the castle, where was set ready for them a feast made up of coarse profusion. On the blackened wood of the table were hogs roasted whole, and great smoking joints of fresh meat, and joints of bucaned meat, and roasted birds, with pimento and other sauces; and before each cover was a great black-jack of liquor set in a little pool of sloppings. To a European eye the feast was rather disgusting than generous; but to the buccaneers, new from the lean fare of shipboard, it was princely; and they pledged the Governor with choking draughts every time they hacked themselves a fresh platterful.

Prince Rupert, seeing no way to avoid the scene without giving offence, was seated at Monsieur D'Ogeron's right hand; and noticing a hussy about to plant herself at the Prince's right, Stephen Laughan clapped down in that place himself, to the amusement of all, and his own confusion. His Highness's secretary (being in truth a maid) had but small appetite for orgies, and had been minded to slip away privily to a quiet chamber.

But the sight of that forward hussy was too much; and sooner than let the Prince be pestered by her horrid blandishments, Stephen sat at his side throughout the meal, and attempted to discourse on those genteel matters which were more fitting to a gentleman of Rupert's station.

Each buccaneer had brought with him his bucket of pieces-of-eight, which he nursed between his knees as he sat, with a loaded pistol on top as a makeweight and a menace to pilferers; and after that all had glutted themselves with meat, they swept the joints and platters to the floor, not waiting for the slaves to remove them, and called for more drink and the dice boxes, both of which were promptly set before them. And then began the silliest exhibition imaginable; for the buccaneers, with abstinence at sea, were unused to deep potations, whilst Monsieur D'Ogeron, though he had been drinking level with the best of them, was a seasoned cask which wine could never addle; and moreover, 'tis my belief the dice were cogged. The old rogue approached them craftily too, saying at first that he had but small mind for play, being in a vein of indifferent luck; whereupon they taunted him so impolitely, that at last he seemed to give way, and in a passion offered to play the whole gang of them at once.

They accepted the challenge with shouts, and

Jean Paul fetched a sack of coin and dumped it against his master's chair; and so the play began, with small stakes at first, the Governor steadily losing. The guests, in the meantime, quarrelled lustily amongst themselves, and twice a pair of them must needs step away from the tables and have a bout with their hangers, and so earn a little blood-letting to cool their tempers. But for the most part they sat in their places in the sweltering, stifling heat of the chamber, and drank and shouted, and watched the rattling dice eagerly enough, and scrabbled up the coins from amongst the slop of liquor on the tables. And as they won and the Governor lost, so much the more did they shout for the stakes to be raised, till at last the Governor yielded, and hazarded fifty pieces on every throw.

Then came a change to the fortune. Monsieur D'Ogeron, it seemed, could not be beaten. He won back his own money that he had lost; he won great store of other moneys, in fat shining handfuls; and he vaunted loudly of his skill and success. "You dared me," he cried, "to raise the stakes; and I did it, and have conquered you. And now I dare you to raise 'em again." Upon which they accepted his challenge with oaths and shouts, and the play went on. A hundred pieces were staked on every throw of the dice box, and

almost every time did the Governor gather in, till Stephen Laughan, who accounted it the greatest of foolishness to lose at gaming, could have wept at the silliness of the buccaneers in not leaving off the contest. But the play progressed till each man was three-parts ruined, and it did not stop till some were asleep under the tables, and the hussies and the traders from the settlement rose in a body and dragged the rest of the seamen away.

Throughout the play Prince Rupert had sat quietly at the Governor's right hand, puffing at a long pipe of tobacco, observing with his keen eyes all that happened, and answering courteously enough when spoken to. The men around him were the rudest this world contained; esteeming themselves the equals of any, and the superiors of most. But there was a natural dignity which hedged his Highness in, over which even they did not dare to trespass; and so, by way perhaps of a sly revenge, they contented themselves by gibing now and again at his easily-blushing secretary. It was not till the play had ended, and the Governor sat back with a sigh of contentment in his great carved chair of Spanish mahogany, that the Prince saw fit to make the proposal by which he regained his liberty.

"Monsieur," he said, "I have some small skill

at the dice myself. Now that your other opponents have ceased to contend, will you humour me by throwing just three mains?"

The Governor turned on him with a vinous eye. "Your Highness has seen the way we play here in Tortuga? It must be for ready money jangled down on the board."

"Money, as you know, Monsieur, I have none, else had I not been here, but away with mine own ships as their admiral, earning money for the King. But I have a gaud or two left. Here is a thumb ring set with a comely Hindu diamond-stone, which already you have done me the honour to covet. I will wager you that, against a small canoe and permission for myself and Master Laughan here to use it."

"You want to leave me!" said the Governor, frowning.

"I wish to go across to Hispaniola to see for myself these buccaneers of meat at their work, and afterwards to take up such adventures as befall."

"Your Highness will find but vile entertainment amongst those savage fellows."

The Prince glanced over the littered banquet chamber. "I was sitting here ten hours ago: I am sitting here now. Let that suffice to show I am not always fastidious."

"The fellows did feed like swine, and that is a

fact," said the Governor; "but if your Highness had drunk cup for cup with them, instead of keeping a dry throat, you'd have felt it less. As for Master Laughan, I do not believe he has wet his lips once since we have sat here. He snapped at the ladies and he shuddered at the men. 'Tis my belief that if Master Laughan were stripped he'd prove to be a wench."

"Monsieur," said the Prince wrathfully, "any insult thrown at Master Laughan will be answered by myself. For his manhood I can vouch. In action he has twice saved my poor life. If it please you to take your sword, I will stand up before you now in this room."

"Pah!" said the Governor. "I do not take offence at that. I will not fight."

"You will not fight, you will not game! You own but indifferent manhood!"

"Game!" cried the Governor. "I will throw you for that thumb ring if you wish to lose it."

"Be it so," said Rupert, and quickly stretching out his hand gathered up the Governor's dice and their box.

Monsieur D'Ogeron reached out his fingers angrily. "Your Highness," he said, "give back those tools. They are mine, and I am used to them, and I play with no other."

"They content me very well," said Rupert.

"As a guest I claim the privilege of using them. Look!" he said, and cast them thrice before him on to the table. "They throw sixes every time. They are most tractable dice."

The Governor of Tortuga thrust back his chair, and for a minute looked like an animal about to make a spring. But he knew when he was beaten, and being a man who regarded honour as imbecility, he sought only to make the best bargain suitable to his own convenience.

"Your Highness," he said, "the dice you hold are useful to me."

"I make no doubt of it," said the Prince. "I have watched you throw them with profit during these past many hours."

"It would please me to buy them back. I will pay for them a suitable canoe and victual, such as you ask for."

"With leave for Master Laughan to voyage with me as personal attendant?"

"I will throw him in as a makeweight if your Highness will condescend to forget any small feats which it seemed to you the dice were kindly enough to perform in my favour."

The Prince surrendered the box with a courtly bow. He could be courtly even with such vulgar knaves as the Governor of Tortuga. "You may continue to use these ingenious dice as you please,

Monsieur," said he. "I am not sufficiently enamoured of your good subjects here in Tortuga to wish to set up as their champion. And," he added, "I make no doubt you will be as glad to be shut of me as I am to be rid of your society. We do not fall in with one another's ways, Monsieur. We seem to have been differently brought up."

In this manner, then, Prince Rupert and his humble secretary got their quittance from Tortuga, and put across the strait to the vast island of Hispaniola, where men of the French and English races hunt the wild cattle, and the Spaniards war against them with an undying hostility. It was in a lonely bay of this island that the blacks set them ashore, and at once the discomforts of the place gave them the utmost torment. For the night, to ward off the dews and the blighting rays of the moon, the blacks built them a shelter of leaves and branches, but there was little enough of sleep to be snatched. The air drummed with insects. In the Governor's castle at Tortuga the beds were warded by a tent-like net of muslin, called in these countries a pavilion ; but these they lacked, and the expedient of the buccaneers, who fill their residences with wood-smoke, they considered even worse than the insect pest itself.

In the morning they rose in very sorry case. They were sour-mouthed for want of sleep, their bodies were swollen and their complexions blotched with the bites, and the negroes (doubtless by order from Monsieur D'Ogeron) had sailed off with the canoe during the night. Of food they had but a very scanty store, of weapons only their swords, and the country beyond them was savage and deadly in the extreme.

The Prince, however, was in no wise cast down. Through the thick grasses on the bay side he discerned some semblance of a track, and saying that it was as likely to lead them to the buccaneers as any other route, shouldered his share of the provisions, and stepped out along it at a lusty pace. His secretary followed him, as in duty bound, though with great weariness; and together they toiled up steep slopes of mountain under a sun that burned like molten metal. The shrubs and the grasses closed them in on either side, so that no fanning of breeze could get nigh to refresh them; and though fruits dangled often by the side of the path, they did not dare to pluck and quench their thirst, being ignorant as to which were poison. Twice they heard noises in the grass, and fearing ambuscade, drew, and stood on guard. But one of these alarms was made by a sounder of pigs which presently dashed

before them across the path; and what the other was they did not discover, but it drew away finally into the distance. And once they came upon the bones of a man lying in the track, with a piece of rusted iron lodged in the skull. But no sign of those they sought discovered itself, and meanwhile the path had branched a-many times, and was growing in indistinctness. It was not till they were well-nigh exhausted that they came upon the crest of the mountain (which in truth was of no great height, though tedious to ascend by reason of the heat and the growths), and from there they saw stretched before them a savannah of enormous width, like some great field, planted here and there with tree clumps, sliced with silver rivulets, and overgrown with generous grasses. For full an hour they lay down panting to observe this, and to spy for any signs of buccaneers at their hunting; and at last, in the far distance, saw a faint blue feather of smoke begin to crawl up from amongst a small copse of timber.

On the instant his Highness was for marching on; and although his secretary brought forward many and excellent reasons for a more lengthened halt, his Highness laughed them merrily enough to scorn, and away once more they went, striding through the shoulder-high grasses, and panting under the torrent of heat. More and more ob-

scure did the track become as they progressed, and more and more branched. Often it seemed as though it were a mere cattle path, bruised out by passing herds. And, so uncertain were they of the directions, being without compass and not always seeing the sun, that they were fain to ascend every knoll which lay in their path to justify their course.

The march, then, it may be gathered, was infinitely wearisome and tedious, and when at last they did gain the tree clump which yielded up the thin feather of smoke, the Prince was owning to a sentiment of fatigue, and his secretary was ready to drop with weariness. They were fitter for bed than for fighting, and yet fighting was nearer to them than they at all expected.

As all the world now most thoroughly knows, the Spaniards of the New World were growing alarmed at the increasing numbers of French and English adventurers who were coming out to wrest a living from the Main and the islands of the Carib Sea, and were resolved to make great effort to oust these intruders and to continue possessing the countries to themselves alone. And seeing that all sooner or later must pass their traffic through ships, the Spaniards thought to strike at the root of the evil by exterminating the cow killers of Hispaniola, who alone could supply

these ships with the necessary bucaned meat. But these men, "buccaneers" as they are currently named, indignantly resented any attempt at extermination, and rather relishing war than otherwise, fought the Spaniards who were sent to hunt them with such indescribable ferocity, that for one buccaneer killed twenty Spaniards were often left dead upon the field. For which reason the Spaniards had grown wary, scoured the country in bands which had acquired the byename of Fifties, and avoided the hunters most timidly, unless they could come upon them singly or in bands of two or three.

The smoke which the Prince and his companion had seen, rose from the cooking fire of a buccaneers' camp; and, as it chanced, other eyes besides theirs had spied it also—to wit, those set under the helmets of a prowling Spanish Fifty. But this troop and their horses were masked by an undulation of the ground, which they had cleverly made use of to secure an unobserved advance, and the buccaneers went on with their cookery with little expectation of surprise. Still by custom they always kept arms handy to their fingers, and when the Prince and Master Laughan stepped out into sight from amongst the tree stems, two steady muskets covered them, and they were roundly bidden to stop and recite their

business. Even after this had been said, the buccaneers received them none too civilly, and it was not till Prince Rupert had begun to charm them with his talk—as he could charm even the most uncouth of men when he chose—that they relaxed their churlishness and invited the travellers to share their meal.

There were three of these buccaneers, two only being sound men. The third, an *engagé*, had been sadly gored by a wounded bull, his ribs being bared some ten inches on one side, and his thigh ripped down all its length on the other. At first sight the two visitors looked upon this *engagé* as a dying man; but neither he nor his companions seemed to think much of the wound, and it appeared that from the active, open-air, well-fed life that these men lead, their flesh heals after a gash with almost miraculous quickness.

There was great store of meat in the camp—the spoils, in fact, of four great bulls; but the buccaneers had grown dainty in their feeding, and nothing but the udders of cows would satisfy them, and so they had shot three other poor beasts to provide them with a single meal. For sauce there was lemon and pimento squeezed together in a calabash, and for further seasoning a knob of stone salt; plaintains served them for bread; and for drink they had the choice between

water and nothing. Once the buccaneers had offered hospitality, they were gracious enough with it, pointing out the tit-bits, and insisting that their guests should do well by the meal. And in truth his Highness played a rare good trencher-hand, for he was keen set with the walk, and the cookery was surprisingly delicate. But through over-fatigue his secretary lacked appetite, and these rude hunters said they held in but scurvy account one who was so small an eater.

The meal, however, was not uninterrupted. When it was half way through its course, the Prince held up his hand for silence, and then—

"Gentlemen," said he, "were we in Europe, I should say a troop of horse were reconnoitring us, possibly with a view to making an onfall."

The buccaneers cocked their ears to listen, and one of them, a tall, pock-marked man named Simpson, whispered that the Prince was right.

"And by gum, maister," said he, "tha'd better ate up t' rest o' thee jock, or happen tha'lt find theesel' de-ad wi' an empty belly. Tha' sees this buccaneering-piece of mine? Four an' a half foot long, square stocked, an' carries a ball sixteen to t' pund. She's a real Frenchy, pupped by Gelu o' Nantes, an' she's t' finest piece i' Hispaniola. I'll drop one o' th' beggars when they top yon rise, an' I'll get three more as they come up.

My mate here 's good for other three wi' 'is piece, an' when they comes to hand-grips, we'll give 'em wild-cats wi' t' skinnin' knives. If thee an' thy young man do yer shares, maister, we should bring a round score o' t' beggars to grass afore we're down on t' floor wi' 'em."

"I'm thinking," said the other buccaneer, "we'd better knock Tom's brains out before we start. I'd not like an *engagé* o' mine to be taken by the dons alive."

Simpson considered. "There's sense i' that," said he.

"Nay, Master Simpson," urged the gored man on the ground, "say a word for me. I can pull off a gun as I lie, and at least I can hough their horses when they come near. It's sheer waste of an extra arm not to let me earn my own killing."

Simpson cut another mouthful of meat, and ate it relishingly.

"There's sense i' ye both," quoth he, "but I think Tom's right. There's fight i' Tom still, an' them dons may as well ha' t' benefit o' what Tom can do. Happen we can claw down our twenty-five if we've luck. But mark tha', Tom, there's to be no surrendering."

"I'm not anxious," said the gored man, "to make sport for those brutes while I roast to death on a greenwood gridiron."

"Gentlemen," said the Prince, "may I ask you if you regard our position as quite hopeless?"

"Quite," said Simpson. "If tha' don't believe me, maister, ax Zebedee."

"We'll be five dead men in an hour's time," said the other buccaneer. "All I want is a good pile of dead Spaniards around us; but we'll not get twenty-five."

"I'd like to bet tha' on it," said Simpson thoughtfully.

"Gentlemen," said the Prince, "I presume you are not anxious to die just now?"

"That wants no answering from quick men," said Zebedee.

"Precisely," said the Prince; "and as you appear to be desperate, and to have no plan, perhaps you will listen to mine. I grant it may fail, but I have seen it succeed before in affairs of this sort."

"Who are you?" asked Simpson.

"I am Prince Rupert Palatine. Perhaps you may have heard of me?"

"Nay, lad, nivver. But let that be. What's thee plan?"

"That instead of waiting here to be assaulted, we should attack these horse ourselves; that we should go across to the rise yonder to seek them, and should charge furiously towards them, shout-

ing over our shoulders as though we had a body of comrades running close upon our heels."

The Yorkshireman Simpson started to his feet, buccaneering-piece in hand.

"By gum," he cried, "young feller, that's telled us t' right thing. Happen we may scrape through yet, and bring in mony a good package o' hides an' taller, an' sup mony another jack o' old Skin-the-Pikes liquor i' Tortuga. Or happen we won't. Onyway, if t' beggars runs they runs, an' if they dunnot they dunnot, an' we gets our fight all t' same. Only thing as bothers me's Tom. I'm thinking we should give Tom a kindly shot before we start."

"Nay, Master Simpson," said Tom; "if needs must I can earn my killing with the best of you. And till that time comes I can be of use. I can shout after you from the timber, and every voice helps."

"Assuredly," said the Prince. "Tom's voice will further the plan."

"It's all very well for you to talk, stranger," said Zebedee, "but it's me that's Tom's master, and has to think for his good. It's my opinion——"

"Here they come!" cried Rupert. "Now, gentlemen, for God and the King: at the gallop, charge!"

The helmets of the Spanish horse had appeared, glistering under the sun, from behind the grasses of the rise. Three shots rang out, and three Spaniards toppled backwards out of sight, and the two sound buccaneers, reloading their pieces as they ran, sprang off after Prince Rupert and his secretary, who led, waving their swords as though to bring up other companions.

"Come on, mates!" shouted the buccaneers over their shoulders: "we have them on the hip. Quick, mates, and we'll kill the whole fifty! Quick, mates, or the cowards will be gone!" And from behind them in the timber the gored man sent shouts of encouragement in various keys, and shots as fast as he could reload his piece, whereof each one found a billet.

The Spanish horse wavered in their charge, slowed to a canter, to a trot, to a walk; and then halted. And meanwhile the Prince and Stephen Laughan faced towards them unfalteringly, and the two buccaneers followed, roaring with glee, as though the whole fifty were already prisoners in their hands.

Then someone amongst the Spaniards cried that they were betrayed, and that they were on the edge of an ambush of the buccaneers; and pulling his horse out of the line, galloped away by the line he had come. Upon which all the others,

saving the seven whom Tom and the two buccaneers had shot, got their horses' heads turned, clapped in spurs, and rode as though an army were pounding along at their heels.

Zebedee came and took the Prince by the hand. "I thank you," he said, "for saving our lives."

But Simpson was not so openly grateful. "There's been no fight," said he. "Ye cannot call yon a fight. By gum, I thought we was in for summat big." And he walked back to the camp moodily, like a man who has suffered disappointment.

Still, even Simpson had sense behind his recklessness, and was the first to suggest leaving their temporary camp before the Fifty rallied and came to seek them again, and advised departing forthwith to a safer headquarters. The meat and the skins were to be left behind; the two buccaneers picked up the wounded *engagé* arms and heels, and carried him between them; and, with Prince Rupert and Master Laughan following, off set all five at a round pace through the grasses.

The toughness of these hunters was extraordinary. For hours they had been engaged in the chase, in skinning and dressing their quarry, in transporting great loads of meat and hides, with barely an hour's rest out of the last twenty-four.

And yet here they were, carrying their arms and a wounded man as though the weight was thistledown, and walking their good five miles to the hour. A linen tunic and short drawers reaching only to mid-thigh was all their wear, and these were dyed purple with constant bloodyings. Their powder they carried in waxed calabashes, their skinning knives in a case of cayman skin, with bullet pouch attached. Their one article of luxury and gentility was a toothpick of polished spider's leg.

To the Prince, hardened as he was by a lifelong education in camps, following in the tracks of these buccaneers was a heavy exertion. To poor Stephen Laughan (that was but a delicately nurtured maid) it was a horrid torment. Her feet seemed like lead, her legs mere whisps of stockings. Her eyes swam and her body swayed, and nothing but the dreadful thought that if she fell the Prince might slacken her dress and so discover her sex, kept her from fainting each step of the way. Yet even at that terrible situation can she look back now, and say that never once did she regret the step that she took to follow across the seas and guard this gallant gentleman she so truly and reverently loved.

The details, then, of this march are omitted, as the historian made the journey in a state border-

ing on the insensible; and for the same reason nothing can be said of the first coming into the main camp of the buccaneers. Even Prince Rupert, as he was afterwards gallant enough to own, was almost sinking with weariness when these strange headquarters were reached.

But sleep is a great refresher, and next morning saw his Highness quite restored, and Master Laughan remembering what was due to borrowed manhood, and making shift to disown all inconvenience from fatigue.

It was a Sabbath, and a day of great council. These strange men, the buccaneers, had come in from far and wide across the great savannahs, to recount losses, and to register vengeances against their natural enemies, the Spaniards. All were by their custom equal that had served a due apprenticeship; there was no king, there were no chiefs, there were no inferiors; and if any by his natural wit or prowess held a kind of natural headship amongst the rest, he was careful not to show it. One would suppose that they would have welcomed amongst them a prince of birth and breeding, whom they could have looked up to and followed as a natural leader; but a truthful historian must confess that they did not seize upon this inestimable advantage as readily as might be supposed.

There was no order and method about the council, but it must be owned there was little enough of boisterousness. The buccaneers sat or lounged amongst the sweet-smelling grasses, some smoking tobacco, some polishing their arms. Overhead a great delicately foliaged tree, decked with scarlet blossoms, sheltered them from the sun; and to windward fires had been built that the blue wood-reek might chase away the flies. One spoke at a time, and the others listened. All had something to tell: all were fierce against the tyrannous Spaniard.

At last came Prince Rupert's turn, and what he spoke was on a different matter.

"Gentlemen," said he, "you see in me an admiral out of employ, and I come to offer you my services for a while as leader. The Spaniards harry you on land, and you wish for vengeance? Believe me, sirs, you will not hurt them deeply by cutting off a few of their ragged horsemen. A Spaniard's deepest feelings are in his pocket, and his pocket he sends back over seas for safe keeping in Spain. Find me a canoe, give me twenty stout men, and I will engage to cut a deeper wound in the Spaniard on the seas in a month than you would here ashore in a dozen years."

Zebedee from the other side of the shadow

nodded. "He's a nice notion of stratagem, brethren."

"But I seed 'im let a fight slip by when it might 'a' bin 'ad for t' axin'," said Simpson.

"You're wrong there," said another buccaneer. "I was a Parliament soldier afore Gloucester, and if you'd seen him and them damned swearing cavaliers ride through six regiments of saints, you'd ha' held your tongue upon that, friend Simpson. No; he's a glutton for a fight."

"But I was going on to say, brethren," said Zebedee, "that this sea adventuring is none to my taste. I say nothing about frying for days in an open boat, eating your boots and your belt, and going half mad for want of a drop of water; I say nothing about finding a don's ship at last, and boarding her in spite of their teeth, and then putting on fine clothes and making the beggars sail her for you into Jamaica or Tortuga with colours flying and every piece being fired off in salute. But what do we get out of it? A week's carouse, and then come back here to the hunting with a shaking hand and an eye that's clogged, and starve for half a year till the work's pulled you straight again. No, brethren; for a pleasant life, give me steady hunting, and steady pegging away at the Spaniards between whiles by way of diversion. I've tried both, turn and turn

about, these dozen years, and I know which is best."

"Zebedee's growing old," cried a younger man. "I'm rusting for a turn on the seas myself. This hunting's well enough, but what's a package of greasy skins against the gutting of a fat galleon's paunch? They both take the same time to get, and think of the difference after. Last time I was over in Tortuga with three months' hard earnings, I'd empty pockets in a day."

"I'm for a venture on sea," said another. And twenty more voices said the same.

"There's sense in it," said Simpson. "I'm thinkin' I could do with a turn mysen if so be we'd a captain that——"

A man came tearing into the camp, half burst with running. "There's a pink," he gasped—"a Jack Spaniard, sailing close in along the coast. She's becalmed, and the current's been settin' her in. Her people are nigh frighted to death. I could see them with my eyes, standing to their guns."

Rupert started to his feet. "Now, sirs," he said, "a fisherman's boat with twenty volunteers, and she is ours."

The younger men amongst the buccaneers were getting ready their weapons, aglow with the thoughts of action.

"There's a canoe down by t' creek," said Simpson, "but there's nobbut one, an'she's half rotten."

"Then we must be the quicker about our business, so that she does not sink under us," said Rupert lightly.

"By gum, young feller," said Simpson, "I'm beginning to like tha'. I'll come an' all."

Already the buccaneers in a body were beginning to hurry down to the creek, and runners who had got there first were baling out the canoe in readiness. She was indeed old and rotten, and moreover she was small. By no means could a score of men crowd into her, and there was competition as to which these should be. Master Laughan, whom these rude fellows thought by reason of his slimness to be of small account, would have been quickly elbowed out had he not at sword's point asserted his claim to a place. But he kept his lodgment in the after end of the canoe next the Prince, and she slipped out into the stream of the river, and so to sea.

Ten men paddled and the other six baled, and surely no adventurers have ever tempted the seas in so unworthy a vessel. The water gushed in by a thousand cracks, and nothing but the industry of the balers could keep her afloat. A single cannon-shot would have sent her to the sharks in half a trice, and Master Laughan noted

"PRINCE RUPERT SHONE OUT LIKE A VERY PALADIN."—*Page 61.*

these things with a dry mouth and a heart that bade fair to leap direct from its resting-place. But Prince Rupert's eye lit as he steered, and the buccaneers bawled a psalm as a fitting start to their enterprise.

So soon as ever the canoe left shore the pink started her cannonade, though for long enough the shot fell short. But when she drew in range the Prince gave an order, and six of the paddles were taken in, and the deadly marksmen with their buccaneering-pieces shot at every head which showed. Helmsman after helmsman was dropped, till at last the tiller was left deserted. Port after port they searched with their bullets, till not a gun was manned; and then, as the leaks gained, and the canoe was sinking under their feet, they took to the paddles again and forced her madly alongside.

Like tigers the Spaniards defended their decks, and like tigers the buccaneers attacked. They had stamped their rotten vessel beneath the water when they boarded, and there was no retreat. If they could not beat the crew below, they must be beaten back themselves into the sea. They were fierce men all, fighting desperately, but even in that terrible *mêlée* Prince Rupert shone out like a very paladin. The Spaniards were eight to one, and when they saw the smallness of the numbers

against them they resisted stubbornly. Time after time the Prince led the buccaneers to the charge, always with a less number to support him, and when at last those Spaniards who were left cried "Quarter," he had but nine followers remaining to take away their arms.

Simpson strode up across the littered decks, and smote the Prince upon the shoulder. "Young feller," he cried, "I take back what I said. Tha'rt as fond of a fight as me, an' tha'st foughten this one rarely. The lads says that if tha' can find a matelot they'll elect thee captain, an' we'll go out upon the seas to see what else we can addle."

"I am honoured by your electing," said the Prince; "but, a matelot? A sailor? I do not quite understand."

"A comerade, young feller, if tha' likes it better. We buccaneers allus has a matelot with whom we divides, come good fortune, come bad."

"If it is the custom of the brotherhood I will do as you wish. Master Stephen Laughan shall be my matelot."

The Yorkshireman burst into a great roar of laughter. "Yon lad!" he said. "Why, what sort of matelot would 'e make?"

"I would have you know," said the Prince stiffly, "that Master Laughan is as good a swordsman as any on this ship."

"Oh, like enough, like enough, young feller. But what good's a sword for killing cows? It's cow killing your matelot's got to make his business, he staying ashore whilst you are away at sea. It's the custom of the brotherhood, young feller, an' tha' cannot be elected captain till tha'st thy matelot, all complete."

"Then, as Master Laughan is barred to me," said the Prince, "I know of no one more capable than yourself."

"Me!" said Simpson.

"I have seen you fight, sir, and I have formed a great estimate of your capabilities. I will do my poor best to serve you well upon the seas."

"But," said Simpson, with his pock-marked face all puckered, "t' lads has named me here as quartermaster under thee."

"Of course," said the Prince, "if you prefer their nomination to mine——"

"By gum, no," cried Simpson. "I'll go ashore. Tha'll be something to talk about. There's them as has this, an' them as has that; there's them as has pickpockets for their matelots, and very bad some o' them's turned out; but there's not another buccaneer i' all Hispaniola that has a Prince for his comerade at sea an' I'll risk t' new thing on t' chance."

"Master Simpson," said the Prince gravely, "I

am indebted for your condescension. If I live, you shall have no reason to complain of your patronage."

"Well, young feller," said the buccaneer, "I hope not. But there's no denying it's a risk. I've not always heard princes very well spoken about. But onyways, off tha' goes an' addle some gold. Tha'rt a member o' t' Brotherhood o' t' Coast now, an' tha'st earned thee place wi' a very short apprenticeship. Tha'st gotten all t' seas afore thee."

The Yorkshireman bustled away to help tend the wounded. Prince Rupert leaned his elbows on the bulwarks and looked far out over the glittering blue and silver of the Caribbean.

"All the seas before me," he murmured thoughtfully. "How much can I make the seas give up for the service of the King?"

CHAPTER III

THE RAPE OF THE SPANISH PEARLS

NOW the captured pink, when they came to examine her, contained very small store of what the buccaneers consider valuable—to wit, gold coins, jewels, or pearls. Merchandise, such as cottons and silks, she was well stocked with; chests of gold-laced clothes she carried, and in these the rude fellows decked themselves during the first search; but all this cargo required further barter before it could be turned into a carouse, and barter was a thing the buccaneers held in small esteem. It was their conceit that as free hunters they could peddle hides and meat and tallow without demeaning themselves; but to trade in merchant stuffs, such as oil, and cloth, and tinsels, and dyewood, was, in their idea, to dirty their fingers. Amongst the Brethren of the Coast there was very great niceness in such small matters as these.

The event, as it happened, fell in very handily with Prince Rupert's mood. Small gains were as useful to his Highness as nothing at all; it was

constantly in his mind that he had to keep supplied the Court of his Majesty King Charles II. at The Hague; and, in fine, it was pieces-of-eight by the puncheonful and not by the purse which he sought. So he proposed manning the pink more stoutly, saying with purposeful vagueness that he intended to venture out upon the seas again in search of plate ships; and the buccaneers, who had helped him take her, agreed with shouts and a salvo from the guns.

There was little time lost in debauch. The nine surviving buccaneers were, it is true, too drunk and too encumbered by their fine clothes to do much towards the working of the pink; but they sat about the decks, each with an open liquor cask convenient to one hand and a naked sword to the other; and the Spanish prisoners, with the terror of death heavy upon them, were easily persuaded to do the necessary seamen's work on this vessel which had so lately been their own. The pink was sailed up a convenient creek of Hispaniola, where forests grew down to the water's edge, and there careened by tackles from her lower mast-heads to the tree roots. Five of the buccaneers departed various ways into the country to secure recruits for this new expedition, and the other four, with Prince Rupert and Master Stephen Laughan, his secretary, stayed behind

to guard the Spaniards and keep them diligently at their work.

Now this Master Laughan (that was in truth a maid) had been taunted a-many times by rude fellows with being a mere encumbrance to his Highness, and inwardly raged at a certain inborn natural timidity, which on inopportune occasion would out. But at last Master Laughan (moist-eyed, and very sorrowful) was resolved openly to trample these qualms underfoot by some piece of desperate valour, or perish pitifully in the attempt. And here lay an enterprise ready to hand. Beforetime, when a guest with Prince Rupert under the roof of Monsieur D'Ogeron, the Governor of Tortuga, the secretary had learned concerning a vastly rich pearl fishery of the Spaniards in a bay at the farther side of Hispaniola. This knowledge Master Laughan had kept secret, timorously dreading lest the Prince with a small force should attempt its capture, in spite of the heaviness of its guarding.

But certain sneers that were dropped by two of those barbarous buccaneers after the storming of the pink (whereat indeed Master Laughan's sword-arm was reddened to the elbow) had driven the poor creature half frantic with mortification, and in agony of wounded pride the news of the pearl fishery was whispered into Prince Rupert's ear.

His Highness heard the scheme with a glowing face. "My lad," he cried, "this is a more profitable adventure than any I have dreamed about. But why have I not been told it before?"

"Because," said Master Laughan, craftily, "your Highness lacked all followers save my poor self, and I feared to tantalise you by pointing out the impossible.

"*Arnidieu!*" swore Rupert, "you should have left me to be judge of that, Master Laughan. I have done the impossible so many times before, that I begin to think there is small meaning in the word. Besides, as you well knew, I was a desperate man in a desperate case. I have pawned the King's fleet for six months without his leave or signature, and it is a fact that if I do not earn plunder without the ships here, I shall earn censure at The Hague."

"I judged all these things," said the secretary, with a sigh, "and the only excuse I can put forward is my poor affection for your Highness's safety."

"Thou'rt a good lad," said the Prince testily—"a well-enough-meaning lad, but at times a short-seeing fool. My life has passed through too many thousand risks to be cut off with a few more. And besides, adventure is meat, drink and opium to me; it is a habit which I cannot shake off, nor

wish to do; and let that suffice. And now for a chart, and more of your tale."

They went down to the cabin, which was hard to reach and ill to stand in, since the pink was careened with one of her bilges clear of the water. They found a chart and laid it upon the almost upright table, and to look at it stood on the bunk coamings by reason of the heel. The thump and squeak of the scrapers as the men shredded the growth of weed and barnacles from the planking came to their ears as they handled the chart, and with it a quaintly strange smell of burning as the men breamed the ship's bottom.

"We could be cleverer with more knowledge on these fisheries," said the Prince, and thrust his head up through the skylight and shouted that word should be passed for the erstwhile captain of the pink.

The Spaniard came presently, shirtless, with his back a mass of stripes.

"*Señor*," said the Prince, "I think you have been foolish, and not bowed to the fortune of war. I see my fellows have been writing their displeasure upon you. It would have been wiser to have shown philosophy and done your appointed tale of work."

"*Señor capitan*," said the Spaniard, "I am a philosopher, but not an atheist. Up till now I

have worked with all the goodwill that could be expected from a slave, but when your fellows for the *leña para la lumbre*—I know not how you call it——"

"Breaming faggots."

"For their breaming faggots, used that which was holy, and would have had me participate in their sin, why then, *señor*, I refused to put my soul in jeopardy, and rebelled."

The Prince looked puzzled. "You are speaking beyond me."

"*Señor*," said the Spaniard, "as part of my cargo, which you took from me, were three cases of papal indulgences. They were entrusted to my care by the Bishop of Maracaibo, who knows me as a devout Catholic."

"Well?" said the Prince.

"*Señor capitan*," said the prisoner, "it is with these parchments, these things of indescribable holiness, that your fellows would have us bream the underplanking of the ship. Some of my compatriots are weak: they have twisted the sacred writings up into torches, and I saw them thereby bartering away their souls before my very eyes. I alone resisted. I alone have earned stripes, and this martyrdom. But you, *señor capitan*, you are not a rude man, like those on deck. You will not ensure your eternal

damnation by permitting this sacrilege to continue?"

"At present," said the Prince, "I do not see cause for interference, being so curiously constituted as to think that I can earn Heaven without the Pope's helping."

"You are a blasphemer."

"No, I am a Protestant, and heed papal thunders as little as a duck fears water; but, *señor*, I will permit you to ransom what remains over of this consignment of indulgences on easy terms."

The Spaniard stepped forward eagerly enough, then stopped and frowned. "*Señor*," he said, "you are playing with me. You know me to be a ruined man."

"On the contrary," said the Prince, "you still own one small commodity, and I would buy that from you on easy terms. You have information about the pearl fisheries in this bay, which I have marked here on your chart. Tell me how they are guarded and how worked, and I will wed you once more to freedom, *amigo*, with the parchments as your dowry."

"You ask me to be traitor to my country."

"These good gentlemen on deck," suggested the Prince, "might offer you the alternative of having your nose and other portions of your honoured anatomy carved in slices, and lighted

matches put between your fingers. It would injure my feelings sorely if I had to hand you over to their power of persuasiveness. And in the meantime, these excellent parchments from Rome, on which you seem to set so much store, are flickering away to ash. If a layman might judge, it seems to me that you are now personally responsible for their destruction."

"*Señor*," said the Spaniard, "your diplomacy is as invincible as your sword-arm. May you live a thousand years. I must ransom these holy writings at whatever cost." And forthwith, so soon as the Prince had bidden those on deck burn no more of the papal indulgences, the Spaniard broke into narrative and told all about the pearls and the manner of their fishing.

It appeared that the industry was then at its zenith. The fishing had gone on for years with always increasing success; but now that many towns of the Main had been raided by enemies, and Spain was still clamouring for the undiminished cargoes of treasure, a greater effort than formerly was made to wrest this wealth from the fastnesses of the sea. First and last two thousand men were toiling at the fishery. It was worked from small brigantines of ten or a dozen tons, of which there were an amazing number. Each night these brought their catch to a great storeship

which lay at anchor in the bay, heavily armed. And for the protection of the armed storeship was a war-carrack, full of arms and men always on guard, together with two armed galleys of fifty oars apiece.

The Spaniard said it was the easiest way imaginable of gathering wealth, the only difficulty being a shortness in the supply of the Guinea blackmen who were used for the diving. These, it seemed, through being forced by their masters to remain under water for twenty minutes at a stretch, deteriorated in strength, and indeed with frequency would most exasperatingly die. There was no relying (said the Spaniard) on the black-amoors to be useful servants, and this was the greater pity because no other substitute could be used, since the sharks which abound in these latitudes attack white men or the native Indians when swimming in the water, but avoid the blacks by reason of their pungent smell.

Much more too upon this matter the fellow told, because having once (as he termed it) done treachery to his country, it mattered little whether the treachery was big or small; but it was plain to see that there was a method in his telling. He admitted that the pearls were there, which of course Prince Rupert had learned already; he spoke upon the methods of fishing, which carried

with them a certain pleasant interest; but he was unmistakable in his painting of the care with which they were guarded.

"They know, *señor*," quoth he, "that your Excellencies, the Brethren of the Coast, would be only too happy to make a transference of these precious gleanings, and they are quite prepared to defend them to the uttermost. The storeship and the guardship are both mighty vessels, and crammed with men. The bay is land-locked and smooth, and they lie there to their anchors, with guns run out and loaded, with boarding nettings triced up to the yard-arms, hand-grenades ranged ready, and close-quarters all set up convenient for a fight. They are fine ships both, with lofty forecastles and aftercastles. Their crews are picked men, and constantly exercised with their weapons. They are in sooth, *señor*, floating fortresses, and nothing but an armada could reduce them."

So the Spaniard spoke on, and Master Laughan hearkened to the words with a sinking heart, and mightily regretted ever having yielded to those goadings which, in a moment of desperation, led to the Prince being first told about the fisheries. But Prince Rupert listened with appetite. He smiled pleasantly when he heard of the richness of the pearls in store, and his eye kindled as the Spaniard described with how great accuracy they

were guarded; and when at the end of his narration the Spaniard said he hoped he had shown how impossible it was for even the bravest of men to overcome the defenders and ravish the store, the Prince laughed merrily, and said he had done just the reverse. "I am a man," quoth he, "that likes a kernel all the better, and hammers for it all the cleverer, when the nut is hard a-cracking."

"Yet I do not see how you can finger those pearls?" said the Spaniard.

"And I," said the Prince, "shall not tell my plans to you or any other living soul, *amigo*. Plans shared are easily spread, and plans spread are handily baulked."

Now, it is the custom of the buccaneers, when they sail on an expedition, that the scheme of campaign should be laid open and voted upon by all hands; and it says much for the influence that Prince Rupert gained on the rude men who formed his following and they consented that he should override this hard-and-fast rule. It was not, as most who read these memoirs will at once suppose, that they deferred to his exalted birth: in fact, the item of his being of princely rank rather warred against him in their eyes than otherwise. It was simply his influence as a man, and his obvious power of conducting affairs, which gave him this paramount weight; and these savage

fellows, both French and English, who before had owned none as master save their own desires, were content to set Rupert over them with an absolute power of life and death. So a charter-party of rules was drawn up and sworn to with Bible oaths, and a scale was appointed by which all plunder was divided.

Meanwhile, the refitting of the pink was attended to with infinite patience and skill. Her bottom was breamed, as has been said, and scraped to the smoothness of glass, and then varnished over the yellow wood. The rigging, both standing and running, was overhauled and reset-up. The sails were all new bent, and the armament thoroughly attended to. The pink was a vessel with a fine turn of speed, and for his purpose Prince Rupert wanted this speed at its best. For, to be plain, he destined the vessel for a feint attack, and intended to leave her reliant for safety solely upon the nimbleness of her heels.

A dozen days were spent about this industry, and one by one recruits arrived from over the savannahs. And then the pink was warped out into the stream, and towed out of the creek by her boats to a good offing, and there, with a prayer and a psalm, committed to canvas and the care of God. Forty-three seasoned hunters formed her fighting crew, each with powder, bullets, buccaneering-

piece, bayonet, and skinning-knives; and for her working, there remained fifteen Spaniards, one of whom, being skilled in the use of backstaff and other utensils of navigation, was appointed sailing-master, with promise of early enlargement. Then for the first time Prince Rupert made known the whole of his schemes, and the buccaneers, in a passion of enthusiasm, ran to the great guns of the pink, and fired off a shotted salute in his honour.

But, great as his influence was, in one matter Prince Rupert was without command. When once they were at sea, with the Spanish prisoners to work the pink, the buccaneers had no notions of restraint or discipline. They ate when and what they pleased, they drank whenever they were sober enough to swallow more. Twice they set the pink on fire, and but for miracles would have consumed her. The stores were few, and yet the waste was incredible. The fellows knew no moderation. They fought at times amongst themselves, they beat the Spanish prisoners, they diced incessantly, and throughout all the watches shouted sea-songs that were often mere ribaldry. When one through sheer exhaustion slept, the others yelled their choruses in his ears, and played their pranks upon his senseless body, till he was waking and with them again. In fine, they made

that first part of the voyage one horrid unbroken carouse.

A term was put on the orgie by the failure of supplies. The pink reeked with the lees of stale drink, but there was no whole cask left unbroached. Of food there was scarcely a carcass remaining, and of water but two tepid leaking casks. But these indomitable men did not repine. They had had their frolic, and all that remained was to make the nip-gut time as short as might be. They crowded more canvas on the pink till the Spaniards shivered with fright, and set up preventer backstays to make the spars carry it. The vessel rushed through the seas with a roar of sound, and the savage men within her were rendered doubly savage by their hunger. But the situation fell handily with the Prince's plans. There was no question about succeeding now: starvation was the only alternative; and these desperate fellows had no appetite for more of that.

In these circumstances, then, the pink and her people came to the western horn of that bay where the Spaniards plied their pearl fishery, and running inshore with a light wind, dropped the stream anchor in five-fathom water. The boat was launched over-side, and in two journeys set thirty of the buccaneers upon the hot

"THEN ONE WATKIN, A MAN OF IRON AND A MIGHTY SHOOTER, TOOK THE LEAD."—*Page 79.*

white beach, and with them Prince Rupert and Master Laughan. Then the boat rowed back again, was hoisted in-board, and the pink tripped her stream anchor, and once more got to sea.

Forest sprawled down to the rim of the beach, and the land party were quickly under its cover. Then one Watkin, a man of iron and a mighty shooter, took the lead, he being by consent the best woodsman amongst the buccaneers; Prince Rupert and his secretary followed; and the rest trailed on behind in Indian file.

Word had been given, and they were careful to drop no sound—treading with niceness, and never speaking even in a whisper—since the success of their endeavour depended all upon their presence being unknown till the time came. And so the whole train of them wound through the tree aisles of the forests like some monstrous bristling serpent, whereof every joint was a different hue and shape.

Their march was not a long one, though exhausting by reason of the heat, and the quags they had to traverse, and thickets of barbed thorn which lay in the path and warred most unkindly with the fripperies of their clothes. Still, when they came to the crown of the bay where the fishery was carried on, they were none of them sorry

(as even the hardened Watkin owned) to lie for a while in the rim of the undergrowth, and there await fitting season for the attack.

The bay before them was busy with life. Lying each at her anchor were two-and-thirty brigantines, from whose sides the blackamoor divers were constantly beat down into the water, to be drawn up again half-burst a quarter of an hour later with a netful of the rare oysters slung around their gleaming bodies. In the middle of the flock of brigantines were the two great armed carracks, bristling with men at practice on their weapons; but of the two fifty-oared galleys there was no sign, for (as was learned afterwards) they had been sent away, and their soldier crews retained to strengthen the fighting forces of the carracks.

There were two thousand men in these vessels in the bay, all trained to arms, and with every advantage of position; and surely nothing was heard more preposterous than this idea of attacking them with such a trifling handful. But no trace of anything else but pleasure showed on the faces of the buccaneers; the Prince was smiling, as, indeed, was always his habit before an onfall; and Master Laughan, though inwardly a prey to the most horrid fears, strove bravely to keep a good colour, and to seem pleased like the rest.

Presently, too, the tedium of the waiting was relieved. From round the farther horn of the bay the pink came sailing in under a cloud of canvas, and began discharging her cannon at the outermost of the brigantines. Instantly the whole scene bubbled with disorder. Drums beat to quarters, and trumpets rang out defiances. The guardship vaingloriously made a discharge of her great pieces on both broadsides (though the pink was far out of any range), and then sent her top-slaves aloft to set canvas. From their lair those on shore could hear the clacking of her capstan as she heaved in cable to get her anchor. And then, after some men had run out on her towering bowsprit to loose the sprit-sail, they canted her head with that, and sent her clumsily surging off to seaward, pluming her as she ran, and never ceasing the useless cannonade.

But the handful of buccaneers in the pink, recking little of the noise and bustle, sailed gallantly in, and ran aboard the outermost of the brigantines. This was going beyond their orders, for Prince Rupert had commanded that they were only to show themselves in the offing so as to draw pursuit, and then sail out again. But it was easy to see what was compelling them. They drove the crew over-side, and then threw of food and water all the brigantine contained on to their

own decks, and, casting off their grapples, sailed away again. They were half mad with starvation and thirst, and they risked capture and the wrecking of the enterprise to satisfy their intolerable cravings.

By this time the great war-carrack had drawn near, and her shot was falling merrily about the fabric of the pink, though the aim for the most part was ill enough. But once the pink was in charge of her canvas again, the handful of buccaneers left the Spanish prisoners to attend to her sailing, and after a drink and a bite apiece, took up their hand guns, and with deliberate aim brought down a man on the carrack for every shot, so continuing till they drew out of range.

The carrack was a dull sailer, much time having passed since her last careen, and her bottom being in consequence a very garden of trailing weeds and barnacles. The pink, thanks to recent attention, had, in sea phrase, the heels of her. But the carrack did not desist from the chase, lumbering along in the wake of the smaller vessel, blazing off her futile artillery, wallowing with helpless wrath. And so the pair of them passed out of sight round the western horn of the bay. The sun was just upon its setting, and they sailed as coal-black ships with coal-black spars and cordage, through a sea and an air of blood—fit

emblems, as it seemed to Master Laughan, of the desperate work which was shortly to befall.

Night came suddenly, like the shutting down of a box, there being no such thing as twilight known in these latitudes; and amongst the forest trees of the shore there arose a thin blue film of mist, which thickened as the night grew, and spread out over the bay, and swallowed the shipping away from sight. But the ambush lay still in its lair, for no attack was to be made till midnight passed, and those on the shipping were locked in their deepest slumber.

Prince Rupert and the buccaneers were in high feather. Their scheme had succeeded with exactness. The pink had drawn away the war-carrack, and there remained only a bare fifteen hundred Spaniards to oppose to their lusty score and a half. To hear them, one might have supposed they were going to a wedding, where all was frolic and gaiety; and yet in all the annals of men it would be hard to find any scheme more desperate than that which lay before them. For their proposal was this: to swim out and seize the nearest brigantine; with her to capture the store-carrack; and then to take the great ship to sea, and so to their rendezvous with the pink. Heard any man ever such harebrained recklessness?

There was no boat, no canoe upon the beach—nothing but a few logs, which would help to bear the weapons, and assist those that could not swim; and when the time came, the buccaneers stripped off all clothes except their breeches, for ease in the water. If they got drowned or killed, these reckless fellows said they could die as easy naked as clad; and if they took the carrack, there would be plenty more clothes in her store; while if they did not take her, why, then, they were as good as dead.

Here again, then, was a very horrid situation for the poor secretary; for to strip was to confess her sex, than which she would liefer have died, and to go into the water clad (being indeed no swimmer) was to court drowning. She did indeed make one attempt to escape the ordeal, saying that it was beneath his Highness's dignity to render up his clothes, and suggested that the taking of a brigantine—surely an easy matter—should be left to the common buccaneers, and that they should send a row-boat to the shore when they were ready for the attack on the carrack.

But the Prince only laughed. "My scrupulous Stephen," said he, "we are not in England now, or even Europe. Perhaps I am Rupert Palatine, as you say, though I have almost forgot. But,

for the time, I am just a tarry sailor, that for risks and plunder goes share and share alike with his crew. And so, my lad, I am e'en going to play water-rat and dodge the sharks. But do you stay behind, if you please, and I'll send a boat for you when the affair is over."

"Nay," said Master Laughan, "if your Highness goes, your humble secretary follows;" and with that stepped into the water, laid hold of one of the logs which the swimmers stood ready to tow, and shut her eyes, and inwardly commended her soul to God. And so the greatest stroke of the enterprise began.

Now the present historian has to confess that of this horrible passage through the water no detail can be given here, for she made it in a condition close upon fainting. Let alone the new sensation of being afloat in unstable water, there was the dreadful fear of sharks with which those seas abounded, and this over-rid all dread of what the reception might be on the brigantine and beyond, and made the passage seem infinitely tedious. But, as it so fell out, no sharks attacked; and when the brigantine was reached, Master Laughan, burning with shame at all this pitiful display of cowardice, was the first to board and the first to strike a blow.

The taking of that dead-fish-stinking brigantine

was in itself a small matter, as there were barely forty men on board, and some number of them negro and other slaves; but it was not accomplished without some dispute, and many cries rose shrilly up into the night before all could be silenced. A gun was fired from the storeship, which showed that she at least was awake; and presently, when the buccaneers had cut the cable, and were moving the brigantine with her sweeps, a breeze sprang up and drove away the mists from the whole surface of the bay.

Here then, it seemed, was the whole enterprise laid bare to public sight, and the one little vessel in the midst of such a huge force of enemies could do nothing better than surrender and sue for quarter. But such was the indomitable courage of the Prince and these savage buccaneers who followed him, that nothing was further from their thoughts. A trumpet pealed out from the great carrack, and they answered the challenge by wild shouts and stronger labour at their oars. Those on board the carrack understood the capture then, and retorted with a broadside from their great guns, which tore the waters of the bay into foam and fountains.

Not a shot hit; but the Prince was as wise as he was daring, and knowing that a couple of those iron messengers might well sink the brig-

antine before she had accomplished her purpose, steered her so as to meet the carrack bow to bow—which, as they had no spring ready to warp round their broadside, they could not avoid. They had only two bow pieces which could be brought to bear, and to these no reply could be made, as all the powder of the buccaneers had been wetted by the swimming. But their aim was bad and their loading slow, and most of the shots hummed through the rigging overhead, or spouted harmlessly in the water alongside.

So the brigantine made her advance, and finally fouled her foremast rigging with the sprit-sail yard on the carrack's towering boltsprit, and came to a standstill little harmed.

"Boarders away!" cried the Prince, and led the storm himself, sword in teeth. The carved woodwork of the great ship's beak hung above, sawing up and down with the motion of the seas. He caught his fingers in this and hauled himself up, amid a storm of missiles sent down from the high forecastle roof. His secretary, fearing horribly, but impelled by love, was close upon his heels; and the buccaneers, climbing like cats, followed close after.

But here came a check. Under their feet were the gratings of the great ship's beak; before them was the high plain wall of her lofty fore-

castle; and at its summit were the outraged Spaniards lusting for their destruction. For general use ladders led from the gratings of the beak to the high roof of the forecastle above, but these had been drawn up or cast overboard before the actual moment of the attack. The wall of wood before them was as naked as the wall of a house, and quite unscalable; and the Spaniards above, with shouts of triumph, rained down shot and grenades into the huddled crowd of the buccaneers, till it seemed that in another minute not one soul of them would remain alive.

But presently Watkin the hunter, being a man of resource, bethought himself of one of the two forecastle gunports, which, though shut down and fastened from within, offered a slight gap. Into this he thrust his hanger, and prised it open another half-inch, till he could get a hold with his fingers; and then, being a fellow of vast and ponderous strength, wrenched the whole port lid from its fastenings, and fell backward with it amongst the corpses and the confusion.

The Prince's secretary was the first to hazard life through the gap, and got in, wounding two opponents; and then in came the rest of the buccaneers, the Prince with his accustomed courage being the last to seek the shelter.

Here, then, they had got possession of the inte-

rior of the carrack's forward castle, and had a moment to gain breathing time, and to tie up the more pressing of their hurts. Within all was dark, but without all was bright-lit with battle lanterns, and alive with the curses and movements of savage armed men. It was plain that the ship was far from taken yet, and the pearls, which they were chiefly concerned with, lay in the lazaret, under the after-cabin floor. So, as the Spaniards were raging before the doors of the forecastle and in the waist of the ship, though not daring to attack them in this gloomy stronghold, the buccaneers slewed round the two demi-culverins which armed its ports, loaded them with grape, and twice shot lanes through the thick of the enemy, before they gave way and fled in confusion, to spots where the missiles could not reach.

"Now!" cried the Prince, "at them again, brethren, before they can re-form!" and led the way out on to the main deck, sword in hand.

But here in an instant the boarders were penned in. The buccaneers might be brave, but the Spaniards were no cowards, and moreover they were exasperated by what had befallen already. Right desperately did the boarders fight, but their numbers were already small, and they grew fewer; and although dozens of the Spaniards

were killed, there were always others behind to fill their places. The buccaneers began to yield ground. It seemed as though they would be driven overboard.

But again Prince Rupert called upon them.

"Brethren!" he shouted, "let us go and find their pearls. It is unprofitable waiting here in this debate. One fine charge, and we'll have their after-castle all to ourselves to dine in!" Whereupon he headed the rush in his own person with invincible valour, and with wild laughter those of the buccaneers who survived followed close upon his heels. A red lane was cut through the mob of Spaniards, and the doors were reached. So sudden and furious had been the charge, that none were inside the barricadoes to defend them, and once more the little company of the buccaneers found themselves in a stout fortress from which nothing but cannon could dislodge them.

The table in the great cabin was set for supper, and the scraps on the platters showed that it had been left half eaten. Down the centre of the table were vast jugs of wine and silver pannikins, and the throats of the buccaneers being parched with fighting, they did not omit to drink. But it was not a time for loitering, though Watkin and one or two of the others were for sitting down then and making a meal whilst they had

the chance. For the moment the Spaniards outside were quiet, but it was easy to guess they were in some way plotting their destruction. So the Prince with his cheery voice urged all hands to search for the hatch to the lazaret.

"Let's win our way down there, brethren," cried he, "and get their pearls, and then we'll be off and away. Their silly ship's too hot and heavy to take with us, so we'll leave her afire to give them occupation whilst we make our clearance."

"The lazaret hatch is here under the table," said one.

"And heavily padlocked at that," said another.

But locks cause small delay to lusty men. A shower of axe-blows beat away the stables, the hatch was wrenched back, and the lazaret yawned blackly beneath. A couple of fellows slipped below and passed up the pearls, which were in handy leather bags; and these the buccaneers fastened conveniently about their waists, with jibes at the Spaniards for making their plunder so easy for the carrying.

Now it was in Prince Rupert's mind that he would fire the carrack, jump from the stern gallery into the water, swim to another brigantine and take her, and so to sea before pursuit could be made.

But of a sudden this plan was upset. One who was spying through an after-castle port, cried that the Spaniards had drawn up eight cannon across the main deck, and were then in the very act and article of shooting, with intent to scatter their own after-castle and the pestilential buccaneers which it contained far over the sea beyond, in mere rags and splinters. Whereupon there occurred something very akin to a panic, and the buccaneers incontinently leaped down through the hatch into the lazaret. Prince Rupert was left behind helpless; and for a moment busied himself; and then followed, swearing, at their heels.

"Now," cried he, "I'm for no surrender, brethren; and if you do not choose to roast like bacon, you'll cut your way out like men. There's no retreat the way we came. I've fired the ship above our heads."

What he said next was lost, for the Spaniards had begun the bombardment of their own after-castle (deeming the buccaneers to be still within its shelter) and all words were choked with the crashing of timbers overhead, and the din of the bellowing guns. Dust fell in clouds, and the frail gleam of a single lantern was the only illumination. But his Highness showed by signs what he wanted done, and the buccaneers were quick to carry out his wishes.

Between the lazaret and the main hold was a strong bulkhead of Spanish oak, and this had to be cut through. The axes were plied with frenzied strength, and the heat grew as the fire above gained hold. The tough wood resisted stubbornly, but the axe-men hewed with an ecstasy of strength, and at last a gap was splintered through. Giant fingers gripped hold of the ragged wood and wrenched it away, and at last a road was made.

Into the hold beyond the buccaneers forced their way, fire and smoke licking at their heels, and the vengeful guns still thundering overhead; blunderingly they picked their way over the crates and barrels with which the hold was filled; and at its farther end fortune smiled, for they found a sliding panel which led to the cable tier. There was a ladder from this to a hatch in the forward castle deck above, and the ladder head was so stoutly defended that two more men fell before it was forced.

But then the Prince himself headed the attack, and forced a passage through the gap; and when once he and his buccaneers had stormed the forecastle and cleared it from those it contained, and had the place to themselves, they were very little more disturbed. The aftercastle of the carrack, shattered into easily burning splinters by her own artillery, was by this time a mass of spouting

flames; and those of the Spaniards who still offered offence did it half-heartedly, and were clearly anxious to be shut of their unneighbourly visitors on whatever terms they would take.

The brigantine still hung where she had first lodged, with her foremast rigging fouled on the carrack's spritsail yard; and the Prince and his men, having the pearls at their belts, and knowing of nothing else that was not too hot or too heavy to carry off, struck up a jaunty song and made retreat by the way they had come. None molested them; not a gun was fired with purpose to do them harm: the Spaniards were all too busy in trying to quell the flames and save their ship.

But the flames had an unbreakable hold, and by the time the little brigantine had got herself clear, and was slipping away from this prickly neighbourhood as fast as sail and sweep could drive her, the Spaniards had got their boats into the water, and were thinking more of saving their lives than of saving the proud ship of which they had made their boast. And what more happened to them the present writer cannot tell, for after the fire reached her powder, and the carrack blew up, all was darkness till the dawn rose and the brigantine found herself alone on a lonely sea. But from the desperate nature of the foray it is sure that they must have lost a great number killed, for of the bucca-

neers themselves only thirteen live men sailed back to sea again, including the Prince, and Master Laughan, and the wounded.

Much excellent booty was wasted in the carrying off, as is always inevitable in these matters; and although the carrack had, before she was touched, the pearls of a whole season's fishing stored in her lazaret, only one-half of these found their way into the brigantine to offer themselves for division.

Over this division too, when they came to the rendezvous, and found the pink in waiting for them, there was like to have been another turmoil; for it is the custom of the buccaneers, when sharing up their spoil, that each should strip naked to show that he has no wealth concealed—the which was an ordeal to which poor Master Laughan (who could have wept at the thought) strenuously refused to submit. Where all conformed, this very refusal seemed in itself suspicious, as even the Prince himself was forced to admit. But at last, after offering to fight all who challenged his honesty, and forthwith being told that it was impossible to fight the lot of them, Master Laughan compounded by being allowed to keep his decency in exchange for all his share of the plunder. Which compounding the secretary accepted with much mortification, having as large an appetite for

pearls as other people, and having laboured very keenly and bravely in the getting of them.

But there was no other way of evading this law of the buccaneers, and so all that could be set aside from this venture for the maintenance of his gracious Majesty's court at The Hague were the five shares given to Prince Rupert as captain. Verily, a maid who undertakes to act a man's part for the sake of being always near one she loves, meets with more trials and disappointments than ever she could dream of at the outset. But Master Laughan did not repine, and all who know Prince Rupert will understand how natnral it was to feel devotion for him.

CHAPTER IV

THE RANSOMING OF CARACCAS

NOW, after the dividing up of the Spanish pearls amongst them, Prince Rupert could no longer retain command over his buccaneers. The cruise was over, and by their laws they were free to go where they liked and do what they listed. All their hearts were set upon one thing—a carousal in Tortuga.

This scheme in no wise suited the Prince. To begin with, he had acquired a vast dislike for that no-gentleman and very vile person, Monsieur D'Ogeron, the Governor of Tortuga ; in the second place (as Master Laughan, his secretary, pointed out), he had no taste for impolite debauches and the company of those painted hussies who lived on the island and sponged on all laden buccaneers ; and over all was his intense wish to earn money for the banished King at The Hague, which would in part excuse his unauthorised pawning of the King's fleet. So he took for himself the small brigantine, which otherwise would have been burned as useless, and remained at anchor in the little bay of Hispaniola,

which was their rendezvous, whilst the pink with the buccaneers got under way for Tortuga, where these rude fellows had determined to fritter all their hard-got gains in one wild carouse.

The pink sailed away with whole rainbows of bunting displayed, drums beating, guns firing, horns braying, and every expression of good-will. The buccaneers who were not occupied in the making of these noises lined the bulwarks and shouted, and drank the Prince's toast, so long as voice or standing power remained to them. Indeed, so ample was their good humour, that one even drank the toast of Master Stephen Laughan, who, being in truth a maid, was but slenderly popular amongst them, on account of displaying a reserve which, though natural, was beyond their comprehension. And so the slope of ocean swallowed them out of sight, still firing their cannon, and drinking, and flying their flags, as befitted men who feared none that sailed the seas, and were feared by all. Whereupon Prince Rupert and his secretary turned into the standing bed-places in the brigantine's small hutch of a cabin, and enjoyed the first sound sleep that had fallen to their lot during three long weeks.

There remained only with Prince Rupert and Master Laughan his faithful secretary, four black negro slaves, which last, having served as pearl

divers to the Spaniards, and being very vilely entreated of them, were easily willing to give true service to the Prince during a short season, for the payment of their liberty when that service should be finished. But his Highness was a gentleman of large ideas, and having still some considerable time to occupy before his fleet should be restored to him, he proposed to improve the interval by sailing across to the Spanish Main, and putting to ransom there the great strong city of Caraccas, which lies amongst the mountains, and La Guayra, its roadstead port upon the coast.

At first sight it seems hard to conceive a more harebrained project. La Guayra was defended by forts and batteries; Caraccas, embowered in the coast mountains beyond, was a place of incredible strength. A navy and an army might well be defeated before either of them; and here was this paladin of a Prince proposing to advance against them in one small bark of fourteen tons' burden, with only one attendant of his own colour, and four black savages who were unreliable even as menial servants. But his Highness had method in his scheme: he was not going to make his attack as Prince Rupert Palatine, but as Prince Rupert's envoy, and his weapons were to be the talkings of the herald rather than the rude arms

of a man-of-war. Moreover, he had heard much of the beauty and wit of Donna Clotilde, the Governor of Caraccas' niece, and was minded to inspect her charms with his own proper eyes. He said it was a weary long time since he had seen any woman with the faintest claim to gentility.

The Prince's secretary, that was a maid who loved him very dearly (though he, indeed, never discovered her sex), endeavoured hard to dissuade him from the adventure, pointing out the value of his Highness's noble life, and the grief that would overwhelm Europe if it were lost in these obscure seas of the New World ; but the Prince merrily enough retorted that he had a-many times shown his ability to keep his life within its own proper carcass, and that it was a necessity for him to be up and doing.

" We cannot set King Charles back on his London throne, Stephen lad, by sitting here on our hunkers admiring the sea views," said he. " The Restoration is the purpose of my life at present, and should be the purpose of all those that wish to carry my esteem, which I know you do.

" Now we must get this brigantine victualled for the voyage, and that I leave to you and the blacks. There are no savannahs in this quarter of Hispaniola, and no wild cattle. But there are sea-cows in the water, and these you must cause

the blacks to harpoon after their barbarous fashion, and then make shift to bucan the meat ashore as you have seen Simpson, and Watkin, and the other professed hunters do elsewhere.

"For myself, I go now up into the country to make a *cache*, buccaneer fashion, for the pearls we have already taken. If we return all sound from Caraccas, well and good; they will be here waiting for us. If not, I have sent a letter by the pink to await the fleet on its return, and so if aught happens to us or to the brigantine, the cavaliers can come and dig the treasure up, and carry it away for its appointed use."

"Can your Highness's secretary be of help in this matter?"

"No, Stephen lad. I will not have you with me as a companion now, because if the worst happened, and the Spaniards took you, they might by chance compel you to show the hiding-place of these much-costing pearls if you knew it."

"Your Highness underrates my poor devotion."

"Not I, lad. I know the spirit is willing, but the flesh may chance to be weak, and if put to the question by these Spaniards, the stoutest might well give way. They are said to be very ingenious with their tormentings. The thing has grown to be an art with them."

"But still your Highness seems to rely upon

the buccaneers in the pink as being honest messengers," said Master Laughan, who was somewhat nettled.

"That letter," retorted Prince Rupert drily, "was writ in a cypher, Master Stephen, which none but my dear brother Prince Maurice can read. So does that content you?" And with this he burdened himself with the leather bags of pearls, and a sword to dig with, and was put to the shore in a small canoe, paddled by two of the blacks.

Now, it is no place here to recount anything so impolite as the fishing of manitee, or sea-cows (which the vulgar still confuse with mermaidens), nor any matter so indelicate as the manufacturing of their white flesh into food which will remain sweet for a voyage. And it would be equally disgusting to speak of the turning of turtle on the beaches, and the salting down of their quivering flesh into other provision, or to recount the filling of water-casks in a river's mouth, and the rafting of them off at a canoe's tail, and the parbucking of them on board at expense of vast throes of weariness and perspiration. Yet, disgusting as they may appear to the genteel at home, these things have to be gone through by all adventurers sailing the seas of the New World. It is the cus-

tom of this barbarous tropic, where gentility is a forgotten word, for everyone to bear a hand indifferently; and on this account, Master Laughan, in spite of a most tender nurturing, was fain to work equally with the unsavoury pagan blacks. Even Prince Rupert, after his return from hiding the treasure, applied himself to these horrid trades of butcher and buccaneer, till at length the brigantine was victualled.

A history of the voyage, too, across from Hispaniola to the Spanish Main would form unpleasant reading. The brigantine was a small frail thing of fourteen tons, and none too seaworthy. Howling greedy tempests seemed her daily portion, and she clawed her desperate way across an ocean that was all great noisy hills of yeast and green, and roaring fearsome valleys. Her water-casks leaked and fouled, and her ill-cured food grew tainted. Nothing but constant labour at the pumps kept her on the sea-top, and everything was wet on deck, and sodden in the hutch of a cabin. Salt-water boils were the common ailment, and poor Master Laughan acquired an ugly red spot on the chin that was quite destructive to all comeliness.

It may be owned also that the Prince's sailoring was none of the best; for though he had some acquaintance with the utensils of navigation, he

was not skilled in setting off a sea-direction like those wrinkled mariners that have spent a lifetime in the trade. And as a consequence he made but an indifferent landfall, sighting a coast which was wholly savage and desolate, and having no notion whatever whether La Guayra lay to the eastward or to the west. There was nothing for it but experiment; and taking guidance from the tossing of a coin, the brigantine's head was put to the west, till a fishing canoe appeared which gave him further directions; upon which she was driven back to the east again, and ran into the road of La Guayra, and brought up to an anchor there after a further voyage of forty leagues.

Here, then, Prince Rupert found himself in touch with the commencement of his enterprise, and proudly flaunted the St. George's ensign of England at the foremast head of the brigantine, and his own banner from the main. The white flag of truce flew from the mast at the bolt-sprit end.

There were four armed carracks of the Spaniards at anchor in the roads, and he saluted these and the shore batteries with a discharge of his two puny guns; and presently the captain of the port came off from shore in an armed galley to ask his business.

The Spaniard was arrogant enough. He drove

his galley aboard the brigantine, little recking what damage he did with the rude contact, and demanded with sundry oaths how any Englishman dared to invade those seas, which were given by God and the Pope to his master the King of Spain.

"I am an envoy," quoth the Prince, "to your other master, the Governor of Caraccas, sent by my master, Prince Rupert Palatine."

"I tell you, *Señor*," said the Spaniard angrily, "that we can have no dealings with any except my countrymen in these seas. Officially we do not admit the existence of intruders."

"*Señor*," said the Prince, "it seems to me that I see in you a very discourteous fellow. I must make my existence apparent to you," said he, and smote the captain of the port lightly across the face with the back of his hand.

The Spaniard whipped out his sword, but the Prince waved off his attack.

"Not now, *Señor*," he said. "I will afford you personal satisfaction after I have carried out my other errand. But since you seem to have had the fact of my existence impressed upon you, perhaps now you will guide me to his Excellency the Governor, so that I may deliver his Highness's message."

The Spaniard glowered in a black fury.

"If you do not," the Prince went on, "I shall sail away; and when I come back with Rupert's fleet, the captain of the port of La Guayra shall be whipped and hanged, if it costs a hundred men to take him."

"You seem sure of being given leave to depart," the fellow sneered.

Prince Rupert shrugged his shoulders, and glanced towards the mast which stood up from the bolt-sprit's end.

"*Señor*," he said, "I have heard many hard things said against your countrymen, but I never yet heard a Spanish official called an ignorant savage. You do not appear to have seen that piece of white bunting yonder, or I am sure even you would not have hinted at detaining a messenger who came under a flag of truce."

The captain of the port gritted his teeth.

"Well," he said, "I shall shift the responsibility from my own shoulders. News of your arrival shall be sent up to his Excellency at Caraccas, and until his reply comes down, you will stay in your vessel here, and not shift anchor from the roads. Have you any name you wish his Excellency to hear?"

"You may say that the Prince's message is carried by Master Thomas Benson, who rode by his side throughout all the English wars, and who

was honoured also by the friendship of his martyred Majesty, the late King. Master Benson's attendant is Master Stephen Laughan, Prince Rupert's own secretary."

"And to what purport is this message?"

"You may inform his Excellency that it concerns grave matters which are first to be delivered to his ear alone, and which are not such as an envoy would gabble into the lugs of underlings."

"Master Benson," said the Spaniard, "when you have finished your embassage, and are free to stand up before my sword, I shall kill you."

"Assuredly you shall have the chance," said the Prince; "and you will not be the first jack-in-office who has bought a lesson in manners dearer than he expected."

With that, the captain of the port went back to his galley, not trusting himself to speak further; the whips of her boatswains cracked; the chained slaves strained at their oars; and the galley foamed away to the land. She was run upon the beach, and discharged her people on to the shore. The buildings swallowed them out of sight, and the first move of the Prince's scheme was played.

For two days the little brigantine swung to her cable within gunshot of the forts, a thing of notice

only to the sun and the seafowl; and tediously enough the work of waiting fell upon her people. The stress of labour was over; there was naught to do but eat the rotten victual and watch the tiny vessel swing over the sullen swells of the roadstead—all to a fine spicing of anxiety. But Prince Rupert showed a vast philosophy of patience, and Master Laughan (the boil on whose chin was subsiding) made shift to follow his example. Then came a summons from the shore: his Excellency, Don Jaime de Soto, the Governor of Caraccas, would grant an audience to Prince Rupert's envoy.

Never, perhaps, has an embassy on so weighty a matter set forth upon its business in less bravery of apparel. Neither the Prince nor his Secretary had procured a change of clothing since they left Tortuga two long months before, and in that time much had befallen. The sun, the seas, the tearing brambles of the forests, and the greedy weapons of enemies, had all warred against their attire, and had reduced it to mere masses of stained rags, which were barely decent. When the pair of them landed upon La Guayra beach, the onlookers raised a jeer of derision. But this soon died away. Unlike the rude French and English buccaneers, the Spanish of the New World know how to appreciate birth and natural dignity, and the majesty

of Rupert's port could not be disguised either by squalid rags, or the plebeian name of "Master Thomas Benson." Litters borne of four awaited them, and in these they journeyed up the six miles of steep which separate Caraccas City from La Guayra, its port.

There was no blindfolding, no attempt to hide anything. The way lay through a narrow gorge of the mountains, and it was cut by no less than twenty-three forts, each with drawbridge, bastions, cannon and soldiers. It was an entrance incredibly strong, and the city beyond was well worth the expenditure in defence. Its sacred edifices were gorgeous; its profane buildings were palaces; and it lay there under the sun, the choicest jewel in all the Spanish New World. A more appetising spot to plunder never met a would-be raider's eye.

Most gorgeous of all was the palace of Don Jaime, the Governor, and the state he kept was in full accordance with his dignity. The *patio* swarmed with glittering soldiers; the piazzas were brilliant with finely dressed courtiers; rich tapestries bedecked the walls of the chambers, richer flowers adorned the galleries. Don Jaime himself was a little old white-haired man, as punctilious in his dress as in his speech and mannerisms.

Through all this splendour, "Master Thomas Benson" in his mean equipment marched, not one

whit abashed, and showed his Excellency a grand manner, equal to his own. He presented his credentials and besought a private interview.

"It is my habit, sir," said the Governor, "to discuss all matters of State in my Board of Council."

"I have his Highness's strict injunctions to deliver my message to your Excellency's ear alone. But after the news are yours, it will be in your Excellency's power to hand them on if you so see fit."

"Sir," said the Governor, "I have a curiosity to know what so gallant a gentleman as Prince Rupert can have to say to me." He gave instructions, and those of his attendants who were in the chamber left, closing the doors behind them. "And now, Master Benson?"

"My message, your Excellency, is short. His Majesty, King Charles the Second, has been thrust out of his lawful kingdom by the present odious rebellion, and keeps his Court at The Hague. His revenues are slim, and he has sent Prince Rupert abroad with the fleet to recruit them. I am here as his Highness's messenger to hope that you will see your way to assist the good cause by a substantial loan."

"The treasury of Caraccas is very empty just now, Master Benson. The honoured needs of

my own master, the King of Spain, have of late been large."

"Ten thousand pieces-of-eight was the sum I was instructed to mention."

"You come to the wrong place for it, sir. Even if I was to apply to the Holy Church for a loan, I could not grasp so much together."

"Then one of your Excellency's captains—Don Sancho, I think his name was, of the galleas *Sanctissimo José*—must have lied most stoutly when we overhauled him a while back. His holds contained nothing but some rubbishing merchandise, and for excuse he said that all the plate was kept back in the treasury here for another year, waiting a stronger convoy."

"Master Benson," said the Governor, "you are right. He did lie. They are very unreliable persons, these mariner folk."

"Your Excellency's eloquence makes the matter clear to me; but if I carried such an answer back to the Prince, my poor bald words might not make him believe."

"And then, sir?"

"Why, then, your Excellency, I fancy Prince Rupert would come with his fleet and pay a civil call, and so be assured in person."

The Governor's face flushed, and he started forward in his chair. "Master Benson," he said,

"take care. You are using very dangerous words. Neither England, nor England's king, is at war with Spain."

"England?" said the envoy thoughtfully. "Spain?" said he. "I seem to have heard the names once. Oh yes, I remember them distinctly now. But, your Excellency, those countries are a very vast distance away from here."

"If you choose to look at it that way, Master Benson, you may. You may even go so far as to bring forward the barbarous doctrine that in these seas might is right. The defences of this place were built especially to accommodate any person who might hold that view."

"These were shown me as I came up here," said the envoy. "They are brave defences—so were the defences of your Excellency's pearling fleet."

"What! Has your Prince attacked my pearl fishery with his ships?"

"No," said Master Benson negligently. "He had not his fleet with him at the time. He was accompanied only by this young gentleman here, his secretary, and enlisted temporarily the services of a few cow-killers from Hispaniola, and took a coasting pink, and with her visited the pearl fishery. He did no very great feat of arms. He was obliged to leave one of your Excellency's

war-carracks ablaze, and the other on the rocks, and make a retreat with some precipitancy. But he took with him all the pearls which had been fished during the season, and those made a very pretty booty for his score and a half of men."

"No word of this has reached me. A score and a half of men against that armada? It seems, sir, that you are speaking of an impossibility."

"There were not many left to carry word," said the envoy. "But your Excellency may recognise these seals which I have brought in my pocket? His Highness cut them from the necks of the leathern pearl bags."

The Governor started, and passed a tremulous hand before his eyes. "Yes," he said after a pause, "they are my seals."

"It was a wasteful way of collecting revenue," suggested the envoy. "Much was spilled for the little that was taken away. If his Highness came here in person to levy a loan for the kingdom——"

"He would never get here," cried the Governor violently. "*Carrajo! Señor*, with your own eyes you must have seen the strength of the forts!"

"It was an open advertisement, your Excellency. So was the strength of your pearl-fishing armada. But as this point of ours cannot be settled without a trial (though for myself I can unhesitatingly declare that the Prince will take the

city if he attempts it) let me bring to your notice another matter which we can agree upon. If Rupert did come before this place with his fleet, you would be put to heavy expense resisting him, whether his arms were successful or no. You would lose largely in both men and munitions of war; your defences would be battered, and shot-torn; there would be burning of houses and wasting of magazines; and there would occur a paralysis of trade which only years could cure. And what would the trouble be all about? To avoid the loan of a paltry ten thousand pieces-of-eight to a needy King. Why, your Excellency, it would cost you ten times that amount if you could beat Prince Rupert off, once he made an attack; and should he get foothold in Caraccas here, you would find it cheap to purchase his retirement for a thousand times ten thousand pieces."

"You put the matter very boldly, sir."

"I am a man of business, your Excellency," said the envoy. "I prefer to put things plain."

The Governor sat moodily, with his chin in the butt of his hand; and for a while he answered nothing. At last he said, "Master Benson, this is a matter on which I must confer with my Council. I pray you give me a day or two for consideration, so that I can send a well-weighed

reply to your Prince's courtesy. And in the meanwhile, if you would use my poor house, and all that it contains as your own, I should be overwhelmed by your condescension."

"Your Excellency," said the envoy, "is vastly polite. Both Master Laughan and myself are highly honoured to rest under so distinguished a roof. But you must permit us first to go round to some of the stores of the city to procure more suitable wearing apparel than these filthy rags."

"I will send one of my officers to be your guide. He," added the Governor with a sour smile, "shall provide you with the wherewithal to buy."

"I could not trespass upon your Excellency's kindness to that extent. I have no gold money to pay for my purchases, it is true. But we have in our privy purse some small store of pearls, which, at a push, will doubtless serve as currency."

Don Jaime grinned like a man in pain.

"Master Benson," said he, "you are a most provident gentleman. If you and Master Laughan will wait in this chamber for a short while longer, I will send to you a guide who shall be entirely devoted to your honoured service."

In this fashion, then, another stage of Prince Rupert's enterprise was successfully carried out, and the Governor of Caraccas, though fully alive

to the unbounded impudence of the demands made upon him, was for the present, at any rate, civil and self-contained. What he might do in the future remained to be seen. He might within another day order the pair of his visitors to gaol, or death, or (still more horrid fate) hand them over to the gluttonous cruelties of the Inquisition, which spares neither rank nor sex. Or, again, he might act the prudent part, and despatch them whence they came with ten thousand pieces-of-eight, to save his splendid city from the Prince's harrying.

But in the meantime the envoy and Master Laughan dressed themselves in all the niceness and bravery which they could procure on so brief a notice, and prepared to revisit for a short time genteel society, such as they had been divorced from for so many a tempestuous month.

Now, in the household of Don Jaime de Soto, it is a safe thing to say that if Master Laughan had held command, the enterprise would not have been damaged; whilst it is a matter of history that the Prince, by his own action, completely wrecked it. Master Laughan, it is true (though being in reality a maid), would have had but small temptation, as she herself quite recognised; but the Prince, being man, must needs get enslaved in a vulgar love affair with a lady whose

charms Master Laughan was quite at a loss to discover.

To be precise, this Lady of Destruction was that very Donna Clotilde, the niece of the Governor, of whom they had heard before; and for those that care for the Spaniards' appearance, she certainly had some claim to comely looks. Indeed, Prince Rupert never tired of extolling her beauty; and it may as well be owned here, at once, that the secretary, who in secret loved his Highness madly herself, was torn with horrid jealousness. But the Prince, of course, knew naught about this, scoffed at all warnings, and in his masquerade of "Master Thomas Benson" pressed his suit with fire and diligence. The two days for the consideration of the Governor's reply lengthened out to four, and four to a week; and when the poor secretary dared now and again to hint that duty required a settlement of the business, he was sharply bidden to hold his pedant's tongue. And so the affair progressed.

Their entertainment was not lavish. The Governor of Caraccas was too wily a fellow to make a parade of his wealth before so dangerous an envoy. But the society was certainly urbane and pleasing after that of shipboard and the buccaneers; and the old Spaniard, from behind his studied courtesies, saw plainly enough what was going

on, and was content to leave Donna Clotilde to do battle with the invader on his behalf. The visitor was clearly infatuated.

Still, what Prince Rupert, a man of the utmost daring, could have seen in such a little doll of a woman it was hard to discover. And, astonishing to relate, Donna Clotilde made no attempt to set herself right in his eyes. She openly quaked when a door was slammed, and ingenuously confessed that the sight of drawn steel would make her faint; and yet the poor secretary, who watched from afar with heart afire, could have sworn the Prince loved her, and was forced to hear his rhapsodies when they were alone, and (more cruel still) was made many times the porter of presents and the bearer of love messages.

But a fine revenge was in store, and the secretary can gloat over it to this day, though at the time it was like to have cost the pair of them their necks. The secretary in his misery had gone out into the gardens of the palace, and had lain down behind some shrubs to be alone with grief. It was night, and the place was dark but for the stars and the faint flashings of the fireflies; and presently who should come up but these two lovers, and seat themselves within earshot, and be talking before the listener could move!

"But they tell me," quoth the lady, "that

"'IT WOULD BE PERPETUAL SUNSHINE FOR ME, QUERIDA.'"
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your country is a place of fogs, Don Tomaso, and that the sun never shines there."

"It would be perpetual sunshine for me, *querida*, if you came to England," said the Prince.

"And the people fight. The mere talk of war gives me the megrims."

"Were you in England, the fighting would end. Let them but see you once, and they never would do aught to cause you pain."

"The good people, it is said, too, wear mighty uncomely clothes."

"For this many a year they have been wearying for you to come and lead their taste."

"*La!* Don Tomaso," said the lady, "you do flatter me. I wonder if all buccaneers are as pretty of tongue?"

"Donna Clotilde would make a dumb man find phrases to express his adoration."

"Fie, *Señor!* the truly dumb can never speak."

"*Querida*, even had I been truly dumb, I should have forced out some few speeches for you."

The lady laughed. "Then what a thousand pities, *amigo*, you were not dumb!"

"Your wit is bright, and I am dull. I must ask your pardon. I do not take you here."

"Why, *Señor*, had you been dumb, you would have said less. Being vastly glib, you have said too much."

"Still I do not see."

"It is the history of Master Thomas Benson that I speak about. You have given it me a score of times, and it does not tally: you forget the details. At one telling, Master Benson is a rude sailor, and has been bred to the sea from his youth up. Next, as a lad he fought in Continental wars, and lingered in dungeons. Now he rides at Rupert's right hand in English fights, and anon he gets swept away by his own narration, and forgets, and leads the charges himself. Now he pictures his wife settled down in a comfortable farmstead; and a minute hence he will be talking of courts as familiar as though he had never seen aught coarser. 'Twas all prettily told, *amigo*, and," she added, sweeping a great courtesy, "I thank you for the telling. Nay, I must crave your pardon too. I should not have slipped out the *amigo*; I should have done credit to my bringing up, and said 'Your Highness'!"

The Prince made no attempt to snatch back his disguise. "*Señorita*," he said, "whatever may be my quality, I trust I have done nothing that you should withdraw from me the title of friend."

"My Prince," she answered, "I am a Spaniard first and a woman next. You have come into my country as an enemy, and disguised as your own envoy."

"You can have a fine revenge," said Rupert lightly, "and get it easy. One word to your honoured uncle, and all further trouble will be taken from your dainty hands. And I doubt not," he added, with a shrug, "that within the hour all further thought will be chopped from my shoulders."

From behind the shrubs, the secretary could hear the lady shudder.

"I would rather compound the matter with your Highness, if it could be done."

"For myself," said the Prince, "in losing your esteem I lose all that is worth caring about."

"You have not lost it," she cried—"you have not. But what you were asking is a thing impossible. Princes must not marry maidens of rank as low as mine."

"Must not!" quoth Rupert blackly. "Who shall prevent it? I am a strong man, and myself make laws for myself. Who will prevent it?"

"I," she murmured; "because of—how did your Highness word it?—esteem, yes, because of my great and burning esteem for you."

And at that (to the poor secretary's bitter mortification) he took her tightly into his arms, and rained kisses on her upturned face. Again the war of words rose between them, but this timid little doll of a woman could be as firm as the

Prince. Marry him she would not; go from Caraccas she would not; betray the Prince (as in his madness he besought) she would not; and yet she demanded one thing of him—a costly enough keepsake. He was to leave as he had come, a poor man in a single ship; he was to forego all pretences to the ransom; and he was to give his word, as a chivalrous gentleman, to jettison all ideas of harrying the place and helping himself to its treasures.

"I am a woman," she sobbed, "that loves your Highness dearly. But I am a Spaniard who loves her country more."

"And I," said he, "can continue to love such a true lady, where I should have lightly forgotten a traitor. *Querida*," he said, "I know your will about this matter, and I know my own: neither will bend. I shall go away in an empty ship as I came, and never shall I come to seek you here again. But I shall pray to God to bring us together in some other place, and till that day comes I will never call any woman wife."

"And hear me," she said. "I swear also——"

But he closed her lips. "No," he whispered: "I will not have any promise of you, *querida*. Woman are placed different from men, and policies may turn on giving their hands in marriage. I would not have you forced to wed, and then

always be pestered by remembering an unfulfillable vow. I would rather have you free, and then, if God wills, we shall come together some day and marry ; and if not, we shall stay forever apart."

"Yet I will——"

"No," he pleaded, "do not give me your pledge in return, or else you will send me away still more unhappy."

And then, bareheaded, he knelt and kissed her fingers—he that had a moment before been kissing her so madly on the lips!—and then with stately courtesy he led her back into the palace. He and she were in turns closeted with the Governor that night, and the next morning an escort with covered litters borne of four paraded in the palace *patio*.

The Prince gave no sign of what had happened: he was debonair as a man could be; and he was "Master Thomas Benson" still. He made his adieux as though he were a favoured ambassador taking leave of the court of a king, and he and Master Laughan entered the litters. A trumpet sounded, and the bearers and the escort stepped out across the pavement. A window-shutter opened, and a slender arm stretched out fluttering a dainty kerchief, and then the litters passed out to the glaring street beyond, and the episode was over.

Down they went by the way they had come up, past the forts, and over the drawbridges of the gorge to La Guayra, the port ; and on the mole a galley with slaves was in waiting to take them out to the little brigantine. But the envoy asked for another half-hour of delay.

" I have a small outstanding account which it would please me to close," said he, " before leaving your very desirable town ; " and asked that the captain of the port might be notified of his presence.

The fellow came up, nothing loath, and saw some very pretty swordsmanship before he was run through the shoulder ; and then, distributing a handsome largess of pearls to the escort who had brought them down, the envoy and Master Laughan were rowed off to their little brigantine, and so once more to sea, and further adventuring.

The Prince was thoughtful and full of sighs ; but the humble secretary thought that the perilous sea had never before looked so friendly and pleasant.

CHAPTER V

THE PASSAGE-MONEY

NOW what follows must I think be taken as direct proof that Providence concerns itself with extra diligence on behalf of great gentlemen who have the birth and parts of Prince Rupert.

No prospects could have been blacker than ours when we set sail again in the little brigantine from La Guayra. Of food we were well-nigh destitute; the little water remaining to us stank; the vessel herself had grown even still more leaky through straining at her anchor amongst the rough seas of the roadstead; and (as though out of sheer aggravation) one of the black slaves had died, leaving only three to carry on the necessary work.

Than bailing water out of a leaky vessel's bilges there is no labour more detestably menial; but a Prince of birth can be drowned by a ship swamping beneath him as glibly as a common sailorman; and so as the remaining blacks showed clear signs of exhaustion, Rupert and his humble secretary had to take their turn at this occupation, and ply their utensils too with lusty vigour.

It was extraordinary how fluent were the leaks. "They say that witches do sea-travelling in baskets," said Prince Rupert once. "I wish we had one aboard here to teach us the trick, if indeed this basket is not too large-meshed for a witch's skill."

His secretary looked at the dim line of the coast. "Anything would be better than staying here to be drowned like puppies under a bucket. It tears me to think that your Highness's dear life should be in this horrid danger."

"My dear life has been in worse case many a time when it was more pleasant to me, lad. And now that it is soured somewhat through thought of a certain lady, why, there you have all the more reason why it will not be cut short. I quite agree with you that there is a strong need that we should find soon a scheme to better our position; but at present I can think of none; and as for taking another turn on the shore yonder, why, that I flatly refuse to think about. I have no appetite for plunging about those pestiferous mangrove swamps till the Spaniards starve us out, and take us by sheer numbers and strength. In fact, I do not want to appear next before the Governor of Caraccas as a prisoner, Master Stephen. You will doubtless appreciate many of my reasons."

And there the poor secretary, being in truth a maid herself, and passionately enamoured of his Highness, turned away and faced the glaring sea, lest the jealousy that consumed her might be seen written upon her face. Though what Rupert could see in that creature puzzles her even to this day.

But neither Prince Rupert nor Master Laughan, his secretary, could afford to keep their thoughts entirely on this Donna Clotilde whom they had left behind them still in the safe keeping of her uncle the Governor of Caraccas. Their present discomforts went far to wean them from the memory of what had immediately passed. Their hunger and thirst grew upon them; their limbs ached with the incessant toil of keeping the crazy vessel afloat; an intolerable tropic sun scorched them from overhead; and, as though their case was obviously desperate even to the fish of the sea, three great sharks swam after the little brigantine in convoy. Moreover, one of the blacks began to show signs of delirium, and had to be confined with leg-irons so that he should not leap over-side, and lose them his services.

For three days this miserable voyage acquired to itself new miseries, and yet no plan came to the voyagers for lightening their case. In fine (and it is hard for the secretary to say such a

thing about her revered patron), Prince Rupert lost his reckoning, and owned as much. He was at the best an inaccurate navigator, being brought up to nobler trades. And so there they were careering through a hot sun-scorched sea, with no land in sight, and the only hope remaining to them that if they kept at it long enough, they would, if they did not starve or drown first, fetch up somewhere in the long run.

"We are true buccaneers now, lad," said Rupert lightly, "for viler navigators and more desperate blades never sailed the Caribbean. My courage would be equal to attacking a caravel single-handed now—especially if my nose told me he had a meal preparing in his cook house."

As the sun lowered on that fourth day of their travel, a fog bank lifted out of the ocean ahead, a common enough sight in those unwholesome seas of the New World, and a breeding place for the calentura and other disorders. There is nothing in this you will say worthy of being commented upon in these memoirs; but when dark at last fell with all its tropical suddenness, this fog lit up with a glow, and as they drove nearer to it in their voyage, this glow seemed to collect and concentrate upon a centre.

At first they had taken the appearance for some

trick of the sun which in these regions often leaves a reflection in the Eastern sky that lingers long after its setting; but this glow endured too long, and moreover it grew more concentrated, and increased in brightness; and so there came to the Secretary's lips a suggestion that some island lay ahead, and that its savannahs had been fired by buccaneers to drive the game into their snares. "There may be a wholesome meal close ahead of us," said the secretary, "and afterwards, your Highness' charm will surely enlist some of these rude hunters into your service. It is my humble suggestion that Providence evidently intends us to find profit presently from some adventure ashore."

"That may be," said Rupert. "But my own idea is that shore's as far off as ever, and that just now we're staring at somebody's ship ablaze. Look now; if we bale a little harder, we may dare to give this basket of ours a few square yards more sail, and so come up with her all the quicker."

So they set the blacks to loose and hoist the two topsails, and sheet them home, and then took it by turns to assist the tired creatures at their intolerable baling.

The Secretary will confess to have experienced a pang when the next half-hour's sailing proved

His Highness to be right. On land once more, she could have shown a stout manner to whatever adventure or hardship lay before them. But land seemingly lay as far off as ever; indeed they did not even know its whereabouts; and here on this unstable sea poor Master Stephen was every minute forced violently to drag back her courage, lest it should slip from her shuddering breast and be overboard beyond reclaim. Indeed only the all-mastering love she bore for this adorable hero kept her from disgracing the livery of her borrowed manhood.

But Rupert's courage was in no way dulled; indeed matters that would have daunted all other men (let alone maids) always heartened that great soldier; and, besides, with his infinite strategy he saw here ahead of him an opportunity for earning monies for his master the King at the Hague, whom he was so diligently endeavouring to serve. From the moment of making sure that the glow came from a burning ship, he was all of a fidget to make the brigantine move faster; and indeed his haste was natural, for as they drew more near, and the wind slackened, it seemed likely that the ship would burn to the water's edge and sink before he could come up and drive his bargain with her.

They could see the vessel plainly now, a tidy-

sized pink (or brig, to give her the newer name) with her bolt-sprit a mere flag of fire, her foremast already over the side, and the forepart of her hull little better than a bonfire of flames. The men upon her stood out black against the blaze which they fought so vehemently to subdue. They were massed for the most part in a mob on her aftercastle and as they drew nearer, Prince Rupert could see others standing on stages slung over the side, passing up water to quench the flames in every conceivable shape of pitcher, from ale-jacks to mess-kids.

It cannot be said that the reckless fellows showed any outward fear for the horrid death that was already beginning to scorch them. They were chanting a psalm when the brigantine first drove within earshot; but apparently thinking they had done enough for their souls with this exercise, they presently set up some ribald drinking song which had acquired a dirty popularity in the taverns of Tortuga, and bawled it out full-lunged to the accompaniment of water hisses and flame-roar.

With the glare of the fire dazzling their eyes, and the occupation of fighting it filling their minds, they did not see the brigantine till she sailed up through their smoke and rounded up head to wind just beyond pistol-shot; and when

they did make the discovery, their behaviour was none too civil. Even had there been any doubt about their being French and English buccaneers, they proved it very plainly now. Spaniards would have shown panic and pleaded for their lives with threats and promises: these fellows were for taking what they wanted by sheer dash and impudence.

"Just the packet we want, lads," roared the great rude creature who commanded her. "She's only a Jack-Spaniard, and'll be taken as easy as skinning a bull. Strip and swim for her. We'll come back and salve our plunder afterwards."—Upon which they all began to doff their draggled finery with astonishing haste.

But Rupert stood up in the brigantine's rigging and called sharply for them to wait a moment and hear him. Upon which, catching the sound of his English words, they stopped their bawling and listened.

"I am willing to give you passage, gentlemen, upon reasonable conditions. But my conditions I must have: you will understand I am no common carrier."

The tall man who had spoken before gave voice. "You seem to talk very big, you in your small ship. I am Captain Wick. Who the devil are you?"

Prince Rupert louted low. "I fear you will not know my poor name sir, though at home in England and Europe it has been heard some few times. There they call me Rupert Palatine."

The tall man whistled. "You'll be the Captain that pawned his ships to old Skin-the-Pike in Tortuga?"

"Monsieur D'Ogeron, the Governor, held some cavaliers who were my very dear friends, and no other way showed itself of ransoming them. Besides, I wanted their swords for my enterprises."

"Well, gratitude's no crime, though there's many in these pagan seas thinks it first cousin to foolishness. No, I can't say I think any the worse of you, Captain Rupert, for what you have done."

"Sir," said the Prince, "your approval overwhelms me."

"Don't mention it," said Captain Wick, "and don't let us waste any more time in speeches. This perch here is getting hot. Take us off, like a decent man, and you have my word for it you shall be no loser. We gutted a fat Spaniard yesterday—a Seville ship he was, new out of Maracaibo—and after the fight, all our hands got so drunk, he had the ingratitude to slip away; and as we found ourselves afire in the forehold, we'd no time just then to set about rechasing him.

I'll make free to own the fire was beginning to bother us when you came up."

"It has a solid look about it just now," said Rupert, and he had to shout, for the roar of the devouring flames overtopped all quieter voice. "And so as a business man yourself you will be ready to pay all the higher for your conveyance elsewhere. It is well we should get these ungenteel matters of commerce settled first. It would put an unpleasant finish on our voyaging together if bad blood rose between us when the hour came for settling the bill for passages."

Whereupon Captain Wick broke out into some very fierce and wrathful language.

But Prince Rupert preserved an admirable temper. "Sir," he said, "I am new to this trade of passenger-carrying, and I trust I have too much niceness to make a commencement with a bevy of unwilling guests. Let me call to your mind that I am offering no compulsion. If you do not like my terms, I will draw off and continue my proper voyage, and as for you—why, you, sir, and your merry gentlemen can continue to tend your fire."

It was clear that Captain Wick had fine appetite for another outburst of words and temper; but the growing heat of the flames behind was every moment worse to be borne, and so with a

hard effort he kept his tongue civil. "Well," he said, "what are your terms?"

"I do not want, sir, to drive too hard a bargain. I will not take more than you can offer."

"Meaning all we have? That's gluttonous enough, anyway."

"I did not come out to these amusing seas merely to study philosophy and refinement."

"That I'll be sworn you didn't. You might be a common buccaneer like me, with a matelot ashore to provide for, from the keenness you show."

"Why there, sir," said Rupert, "you have hit off my condition in a phrase. I was formally and solemnly adopted into your desirable Brotherhood after strict examination and full trial of my poor abilities, and I have a good camerade now meat-hunting ashore in Hispaniola. Even if I were disposed to forego my own advantage, I could not remain loyal to him and let this chance of earning moneys slip by me. It is a vital condition of our partnership that we share and share alike, and that each should do his best for his matelot."

"You need not remind an old buccaneer of the first principle of the Brotherhood. How do they name your matelot?"

"Simpson. He's a finely accurate shot."

"A man well freckled with pock-markings?"

"He is so distinguished."

"Simpson and I have been shipmates. Well, I'll have no hand in defrauding Simpson—especially as I've small choice in the matter. But if the chance comes my way for driving another hard bargain, just you look to yourself, Captain Rupert."

"Sir," said the Prince, "I've done very little else these some years. Do you answer for your crew standing honourably by the conditions?"

"You shall swear each fellow for yourself when they come aboard. Man, make haste and bring that cockle-shell of yours athwart our stern. The bacon is beginning to frizzle on us already, and presently some of us will be cooked alive. I must say you make a rather poor show of your hospitality."

"You will not blame me presently, sir. As it is you will enjoy the fare here. Had you come from anything short of desperation, I fear you would have turned up your honoured noses at its roughness."

The brigantine's head was canted with the sprit-sail till she gathered way again, and she was so manœuvred that Master Stephen Laughan, who was standing on the forward castle, caught a rope which was hove to him, and made it fast to

one of the knightheads. Singly the buccaneers made their way down this from the high poop which towered above, each carrying a bag filled with the more valuable of the Spaniard's plunder to pay his passage, and each, as he dropped foot on the deck, was made to swear a most comprehensive obedience. A Bible, a crucifix and a naked blade were set ready, and the oath was taken on all three, so that whether the man was of the Reformed Religion, or Papist, or confessed no creed at all, one or other of the oaths was bound to pledge him, and so there would be no wriggling out through this very common bye-way.

"By the Lord!" said Captain Wick, who was the last to come on board. "By the Lord, if formalities can make sound business, you should be in a fair way towards storing a fortune. By your leave I'll cast off this rope from the knighthead here and we'll get your cock-boat under way. My old ship is pretty well a-fire just now, and it's on the cards my drunken rascals were not very thorough when they set to drown the powder. The kegs were not all easy to get at in the magazine."

"After your handsome behaviour," said Prince Rupert with a bow, "the least I can do is to put my poor ship entirely at your present disposal.

You may set your crew to work her (for I will own ingenuously that mine are somewhat unskilled), and you may navigate her where you choose. But if I might venture to suggest, I should say that the sooner you could bring up with some land, or with some desirable ship of the Spaniards, the pleasanter it would be for all of us."

Captain Wick stared. "You have a rum way of putting things," he said. "But let's go to your cabin, and talk it out over a cup of wine. I've a throat that's full of sand."

"Why," said Rupert smiling, "I'm afraid the cabin floor will be a-slop with water, as when we pressed her with sail so as to come down to you the quicker, the leaks rather gained on us."

"By the Lord!" cried Wick, fairly startled, "she feels sodden enough under the feet now you call attention to it. Why, your lower deck ports are well-nigh awash."

"Oh, I gave the brigantine no certificate for seaworthiness, when I asked you to honour us with your presence."

"Well, you're a cool one, anyway," said Wick, and gave sharp orders to his men to take a spell at the baling.—"But sink or swim, that doesn't alter my thirst, and if we can't wash our necks politely seated in the cabin, why, bid one

of your blacks bring aft the wine on to the poop, and we'll drink to our better acquaintance there."

"I fear, sir," said Prince Rupert, still with his best manner, "that you will think me most cursedly remiss, but our provisioning has been plaguely ill done, and there's not a drop of wine on board."

Captain Wick stared still more, and then, as a thought struck him, he went to the scuttle-butt and took a sample from the dipper. "And your water stinks!" he spluttered. "Faugh! do you keep ducks in your casks? Man, tell me squarely, what entertainment is it that you have asked us to?"

"Lean enough, I fear, but I have no wish that it should endure longer than is absolutely needful. As a buccaneer, sir, you are my senior, and I bow to your experience, but as a mere soldier, I should say that the strategy indicated is to go to the nearest place where provisions are stored whether it is afloat or ashore, and procure them in the handiest way which occurs to us."

Captain Wick slapped his thigh. "Well," he said, "this is the maddest turn-out! You've neither meat, wood, nor water; you've a little old ship that leaks like a fishing net; you've no force——"

"Ah, pardon me there, sir. You see before you two very good swords, who would be quite pleased to parade themselves against any other two you can put against them."

"Give it if you like, you've an army of two, yourself and this slim youngster here. You must have left a very ugly place behind you to have sailed out so blithely into this fix."

"In honest truth we did. But being here, sir, and having you and your excellent friends as companions, I repeat that the shrewdest thing at present seems to me that we should sail with as much canvas as we can carry towards the nearest meal. Come, Captain Wick, I'm still but raw in these seas, and you are likely to know far more where the good things are stowed. What do you say? Are we to get ashore and hunt bullocks? Or is there some convenient town to sack, or some castle to ransom? Or can you guarantee that we shall find a Spaniard on the sea, and get our next dinner from him before we are absolutely starving?"

Captain Wick leaned up against the bulwarks and laughed. "This is like the old hard, wicked times once more, when buccaneers sailed cheerfully against an armada in a canoe—and sometimes took it. It gives me a thrill to be desperate again. I oughtn't to be merry, I know, but spit

me if I can help it. I've lost my ship, I've been robbed of my lawful plundery, I'm out of the frying-pan into the fishing-net, but by the Lord, there's something too humorous about the whole adventure to let one work up a proper pitch of anger."—His face sobered with a sudden pucker of recollection.—"Rupert," he repeated, "Captain Rupert. Isn't it Prince Rupert I should have said?"

"So I am more usually known."

Captain Wick changed his manner. He lugged off his feathered hat and made a great bow. "My lord," he said, "you must excuse these manners I've been showing you. At first I thought you were a rogue, and then I thought you were a madman, and then I judged you were a fool, but I never guessed you were a born prince and there's the truth of it. I was only a common seaman before the mast before I drifted out to these seas of the New World, and earned distinction, and so at home I was not in a position to meet Princes, and here there are none to come across. But believe me, my lord, it gives me great pleasure now to make your acquaintance, and devil take the expense. Indeed I don't grudge the expense: Princes out here will want to make their bit like other men."

The secretary, who stood near, looked for an

explosion of his Highness' anger, for there were times when Prince Rupert could defend his dignity with great niceness and punctilio. For it was in Master Laughan's mind that this Wick was merely mocking her patron, since of all these rude buccaneers they had come across so far in the New World, they had not met one who showed a particle of reverence for a great name and exalted birth for their own sakes. But Prince Rupert, with his usual fine discernment, saw otherwise; indeed he understood in a flash that the man was dazzled at finding himself the guest of one who carried so illustrious a name: and he showed him some very pretty and graceful condescensions.

The secretary, being by this time so thoroughly wearied out that her eyes would keep open no longer, heard dully the rumble of their talk for awhile, and then dropped off to sleep where she was on the bare deck, but not before a new course had been set, and sharp orders given for the re-trimming of tacks and sheets. The buccaneers, it appears, would have waked her to take a spell at the baling, being rude brutal fellows with but little sympathy for gentility and a slim figure; but the Prince so pleasantly asked them to desist, at the same time speaking so handsomely of the secretary's youth and previous

labours, that of their uncouth condescension Stephen was permitted to further enjoy plank bed undisturbed.

I am free to confess that the meeting with Captain Wick and his men, let alone from the sums earned as their passage money, was indeed fortunate from another respect. That Prince Rupert had high military genius, no one who reads these memoirs, and the other histories specially written upon his person, will for a moment deny. But the fact cannot be got over that if the brigantine had stuck to her original course, his Highness and the others on her would have starved, if indeed they had not drowned first. For the nearest land (if indeed they did not miss it) was distant a week's sail that way, and the seas in between practically desert. But this Captain Wick, if rude, had at least local knowledge and no particular appetite for starvation, and so by his hint the brigantine was headed for Curassou, which island it appeared was conveniently close at hand.

Let no reader think that in owning this, Master Stephen Laughan wavers for one instant in loyalty to Prince Rupert, and profound admiration for his wonderful powers. But the fact is the island was out of sight below an horizon, and guessing at an island's position, when indeed you have

never before heard of its existence, is but dangerous seamanship.

As Wick himself owned the place had small enough fame. It had neither mines nor pearl-fisheries; the Spaniards did naught but gather salt there; and as this commodity would not attract buccaneers, who liked more profitable valuables for their purses, there were no fortifications to protect the works or the labourers.

"But, your worship," said Captain Wick, "at present we need comestibles more than cash, and I take it that these fellows on Curassou, humble though they may be, must have some sort of food on hand to stow in their bellies. And besides, salt-making should be one of the thirstiest trades imaginable, and there you see that drink, and much drink, is clearly indicated." And in fine this prophecy came very near to the truth. In the harbour of the island they found two vessels of the salt gatherers and a well-stored village ashore all practically undefended, and these they took without opposition.

At this point though the very nasty customs of the buccaneers nearly caused a breach—and indeed would have brought about complete severance of the parties if the secretary had had the choice. For the rude fellows, after their usual habit, when the materials for debauch were ready

to their hands, had not the smallest mood to go abroad for further earning, and in this Captain Wick (that was none too sober himself) to all practical purposes gave them his countenance.

"Master Prince," he hiccoughed solemnly. "I am your most obedient servant to command, but you mustn't ask me to make water run up hill, or to cause handy liquor to cease from running down a thirsty buccaneer's gullet. They are common fellows, common as dirt every one of them, and they haven't the gentility and niceness that is natural to you and me. And moreover, as a buccaneer's life is often a short one, he strives to make it as merry as may be. Besides as you are one of the brotherhood yourself, you ought to fall in with the custom. I'm sure Simpson, your matelot, would not be pleased to see you deny yourself. Come, my lord, what do you say, if you and me, that are their superiors, condescend a little and go and take a turn down yonder ourselves?"

The Prince very civilly declined, but still this Wick must needs persuade him further.

"Of course it's not what me and your lordship are accustomed to, but there's entertainment in it. A buccaneer when he's ashore is a rarely humorous fellow. The Spaniards were asked to provide a fiddle, or some pipes, or at least a drum

for harmony; but it seems they are leanly enough furnished with both talent and instruments; and so the beggars have been stood in a row, and bidden to whistle jigs as dance music. The boatswain's been appointed bandmaster, with a rope's end for baton, and I can tell you he's making a dandy orchestra." — Captain Wick fidgetted with his feet—"Oh Lord," he said, "watch 'em dancing. I just must have a turn myself. Here, Master Laughan, you're slim, and should make a most ladylike partner. Come along."

And with that he clapped an arm round the poor secretary's waist (that was like to have died with mortification) and set off into absurd capers, keeping time to the whistling, till the pair of them were brought to a stop through sheer breathlessness.

Prince Rupert (it is painful to relate) was in one of his whimsical humours, and, far from interfering, only laughed and shook with merriment. "Keep it up, Stephen, lad," cried he. "You fling a fine leg. By my faith, you dance the best maid's steps of all of them. Ho! you other blushing, bearded, lady buccaneers, mince your steps like Master Laughan."—And when the secretary came back flushed and angry to his side, and would have reproached him with a look, "Pooh! lad," said he, "you're none the worse.

There's a bit too much of the pedant about you at times"—At which the poor creature tried to smile, though in truth she was but an ace off tears.

Of the two vessels of the Spaniards which they met in the harbour, one was fired, as they had no service for her, and the other careened, breamed, refitted and loaded with the brigantine's treasure and puny armament. The brigantine herself, being left unbaled for a dozen hours, quickly sank out of further mischief's ways. The orgie of the buccaneers, when one came to measure it up afterwards in the cool blood of the historian, was in reality short, for these disgusting creatures consider lavishness the highest gentility, and waste double what they use. But once the liquor casks were drained, they were ready enough to start out for the next venture.

The sun poured down upon their working with intolerable heat; the beach reeked with the lees of their spilt rum; and the fellows themselves, though they stuck manfully enough to their labours, carried swinging heads and crabbed tempers. The Spanish prisoners who were set to the more menial tasks came in for rough usage when their diligence slackened.

But at last all was ready once more for sea, and after the custom of the Brotherhood of the Coast, a meeting was held at which each man

was the equal of his neighbour. They were done with one voyage, and this, *ipso facto*, disrated the lot of them, and forthwith they set themselves to elect officers for the next, and to decide on a cruise.

Now all who read these memoirs will at once think that with so brilliant a commander standing idle at their side, these rude fellows would at once have made humble petition to Prince Rupert that he would condescend to lead them. But I can nohow describe their uncouth rudeness more blackly than by relating that they did nothing of the kind. In fact but one name was mentioned, and that was Wick's; and they elected him with shouts, and saluted him with a ragged volley from their buccaneering-pieces. For boatswain, too, they elected the fellow who had served in that rating before. But their quartermaster had, it appeared, been killed; and as there were two rival claimants for the office with equal followings, each ready to fight for their man, Wick saved civil war by suggesting that the Prince be appointed. Here was a way out of their impasse, and they took it as such, though without any show of enthusiasm, and Rupert was gracious enough to accept their nomination. The readiness with which he could adapt himself to his companions for the moment,

was a singularly lovable feature in this truly great man's character.

In general meeting also the plan of campaign was openly discussed and voted upon, all, by the rules of the Brotherhood of the Coast, having an equal say in this matter before the cruise commenced. Indeed Wick himself drew attention to this freedom of discussion, and pointed out that if anyone of the company could put skill or information into the general fund, he was bound by the laws to give it. "We Brethren of the Coast," said he, "have our phases. Ashore we have our frolics. But afloat we are all for earning. That comes first always; and though causing annoyance to the Spaniard can generally be done at one and the same time, that is not to be looked upon as a serious occupation, but only one to give relish to the other. Now for myself I feel bound to make the suggestion that we can begin our earning here at present in Curassou by charging a high rate of freight for any specie we are asked to carry."

For a moment the buccaneers did not catch his meaning. But someone shouted, "There's a riposte for our smart quartermaster," and then they all burst into roars of laughter, wagging good-humoured fingers at the Prince, and crying out that hard bargaining made good profits.

"Of course," said Rupert, "I'm with you there entirely, gentlemen. Indeed, am I not an interested party, seeing that this cruise is to be worked on shares, after the ordinary laws of the Brotherhood? But I must ingenuously confess that I do not see the merchants who will offer you even small freights to be carriers of their specie."

Upon which they laughed all the louder. "Why, you, sir," they cried, "you are our merchant. And we are the only carriers. The brigantine's sunk. But you will be dealt with quite fair. As quartermaster you will receive your due share from the common fund of what you pay in as merchant."

"Gentlemen," said Rupert pleasantly, "your schemes of finance do credit to your nimble brains. But you see in me at present a banker rather than a merchant, or perhaps I should say a bank depositor. Do you take me?"

They did not. But their faces sobered considerably. No class of men could be in company with Prince Rupert for long without gaining a high respect for his genius.—"My lord quartermaster," said Wick, "you're talking a bit too fine for these common fellows."

"Well," said Rupert, "it's a hard thing to do, gentlemen, but I must avow myself to you as a coward. Transit of goods in these seas seems so

perilous and so expensive that really I have been frightened out of risking it. There's some small fortune which it may come to your memory I earned a few days back—and for half of which I am responsible to Master Simpson, my matelot in Hispaniola. Gentlemen, believe me, my nervousness about that fortune is so great that I have decided to bank it with Mother Earth in this island of Curassou. And indeed, whilst you were having your frolic with the rum casks, I found a spade, and myself put the deposit in that good banker's safekeeping. We contrived matters, Mother Earth and I, that none should steal the key."

The buccaneers bore no resentment at being further tricked. Indeed they let off their guns in compliment to their quartermaster's acuteness, and bade him now that he had taken up a new service, attend to the joint interest as cleverly as he had done before for his own.

The Prince took them pleasantly. "If appetite gives wit," said he, "I should be a clever fellow just now. There isn't a buccaneer more greedy for plunder along all the Spanish Main. And for advice, there seems to me that only one course is open to us. Here is this ship that we have put in trim. You will note that four days ago she was a mere salt-gatherer."

"We all know that."

"Assuredly. I was but marshalling my arguments. Now salt is a very vulgar commodity, but it has its merchants and dealers, and this ship will have her proper port. I do not know what's the port, or what's its armament, but according to me, brethren, it's clearly indicated that this ship's port is the point for our attack. We sail there, arriving openly and in broad daylight. There's nothing hid. We'll set her old crew (who are luckily none the worse for their whistling) to work her into anchorage in their usual clumsy fashion, and for ourselves, we'll sit genteelly down in the hold as passengers and while the time (if it please you) with the dice. Then, when the moment comes, we can walk in and take possession before they have made any preparations for our reception. Come now, brethren, how does my scheme taste to your judgments?"

"We should manage a surprise that way, my lord quartermaster," said Wick. "The question is, whether the place is worth it."

"Ah, that point," said the Prince, "must be left to Captain Wick, who is geographer to this crew."

"The truth is," said Wick, rubbing his chin, "the salt merchant belongs to Cumarebo, and

it's a place I never heard that buccaneers visited."

"There must be a beginning to every kind of experience," said Stephen Laughan modestly.

"Quite so, my lad, but let me tell you your cleverness is more pert than longheaded. News always seems to get about if a town on the Main contains treasure, and Cumarebo makes its boast principally of a very vast cathedral and several barracks full of greasy priests."

"Speaking as a Protestant," said Rupert, "I don't find that Popish idols and vessels do harm to my pocket when they're melted up into currency. My master, the King, at The Hague, favours Rome I know, but I do not think he would be so undevout as to refuse a loan because it happened to come from the coffers of his own church."

"And my master," said Wick with a grin, "and that's myself, refuses deuced little that isn't too hot or too heavy to carry away. That's a good word of yours, my lord quartermaster, about the cathedral. Where there's priests there's sure to be plenty: I should have deduced that for myself."

Three or four of the buccaneers were going to make objection, but he held up his hand for silence, mentioning them civilly by name. "I

know that some of you, brethren, are good Catholics, but you are in the minority, and you'll be outvoted if you force a poll. Now, don't have any megrims, and you shall easy save your consciences. You'll go with us, and you'll do your work like the rest, and afterwards, when it comes to the division, you'll take your whack of plunder like the rest. Later, you can find a reasonable priest, and buy a full dispensation for a tenth of what you have pocketed."

At which the objectors seemed very comfortably satisfied, and as all the others gave their full adherence to the scheme, they drank up what was left of the rum, fired a salvo from their buccaneering pieces to show that the plan of campaign was settled, and then got out to the ship, and so to sea.

The buccaneers considered themselves very fine gentlemen during the three days that the voyage lasted, contenting themselves merely with giving orders, and forcing the Spanish prisoners to do all labour connected with the working of the vessel. Moreover it was their conceit that music should lighten the tedium of the journey, and so the Spaniards were set again to whistle. They were men of lugubrious countenance all of them, these prisoners (as who wouldn't be in the hands of these fierce sea marauders) and the sight of

their efforts at music gave continual merriment to the buccaneers. Very galling, too, the practice must have been to their Spanish pride. But they had no mercy to expect from their taskmasters. Indeed they were lucky to be let off so lightly. The higher humanity has no place amongst the fierce passions which sway men in these seas of the New World. With the Spaniards, their natural cruelty and the horrid Inquisition (blasphemously named holy) practise the most dreadful tortures upon all English and French that fall alive into their hands, and so when buccaneers of these nationalities lay clutch on Spaniards, their natural rudeness at times permits them to make some very gross retaliation.

There was no starvation this voyage, but as there was no rum for orgies, the buccaneers swore that it was intolerably slow, and crowded canvas on the vessel till they were like to have whipped the masts out of her. But the reckless fellows had no appetite for caution.

When they rose the shore line of the Main, however, and presently would come in sight of the town which they hoped would yield them fortune, Captain Wick for the first time asserted his command. With jests and curses and blows he drove all down below to take up residence upon the salt in the hold out of sight, and the

Spaniards who were on deck he compelled with very horrid threats into complete obedience.

"How would you take your vessel into harbour?" asked he of the poor wretch who had once been captain.

"With half the sail she spreads at present," said the fellow.

"Then trim her according to your nerves and your habit," cried Wick. "And see to it there's nothing suspicious in our entering the harbour. If an alarm spreads, my man, before it's intended, I'll set my bull-skinners below to flay the hide off you living, and then I'll take you on to the beach, and roll you in sand. Grit your teeth on that, my man, and see to it your service is as I've ordered."

Only Wick and the Prince remained on deck with a disguise of Spaniard's clothes and headgear to cover them. The secretary was thrust below with the rest, and was forced with much mortification to listen to the lewd talk of the buccaneers, and moreover to stand as a butt to their ribald jests. Oh, let any maid who thinks of following to the wars a man she ardently loves, weigh well the odious talk and treatment which she will have to pass off smilingly.

Time and again, as they passed the bar, and bore up towards the anchorage, did Wick and

the Prince cry down the hatchways that those below should cease their noise, but some funny fellow would always shout back a quip or start a new song, and away the whole lot would go again, ranting and roaring in chorus. And at last it seems Wick lost patience, for he drew on the hatch-covers as an extinguisher, and left himself and the Prince alone on deck cut off with the eighteen surviving Spaniards. Still there was little fear that these would prove unruly. They had tasted too well of buccaneers' discipline already.

In the pestilent heat of that hold, above the salt, the poor secretary gasped and stifled, praying that any risks of battle might be given her in exchange for this confinement, and indeed when the time did come for skirmish, the poor creature was strung to such a pitch of distraction that she performed some deeds of bravery which even these rude buccaneers (that in truth are brave enough themselves, and not over given to praise) clapped at in admiration.

The surprise of the town, as well it might have been, was complete enough. The Spanish captain drove on past the anchorage and laid the vessel up alongside the steep mud bank of the river. A gate of the town lay close at hand just beyond the muddy foreshore, with traffic pouring

in and out, and here was a most desirable place for any buccaneers to make their in-rush.

It appeared at first that the attack might be leisurely and well ordered, but one of the Spaniards on board, spurred on either by recklessness, or patriotism, or hate, or all three combined, cried out to friends ashore that the Philistines were upon them, and although he was promptly cut down by Wick for his pains, the very act put a guarantee of faith on his testimony. A shout was raised by those that did their business on the beach that the buccaneers were come, and wild panic ensued. All rushed for the gate, cumbered with whatever goods came first to hand. Too frightened to discriminate over the salvage they might be, but the greed instinct was too strong in them not to pick up some sort of burden, even though it was merely a broken crock or an empty cask. And at the heels of the mob raced Prince Rupert and Captain Wick, whilst the ship vomited yelling buccaneers through her hatch.

Those inside laboured to shut the gate, those who had not yet passed through struggled fiercely for entrance. In the rear of the fugitives was a great waggon laden with bales, and when this was just in the act of passing the doorway, Wick and the Prince came up. They were alone, for Stephen Laughan who was the first of their fol-

lowing to get clear of the ship, was still a hundred paces behind at the further side of the beach. And with the strong guard that was inside, the gate would have inevitably been slammed to, once the wain was drawn clear through into the street beyond.

"Hamstring the horses," panted Wick, who was near burst with running.

"No time, my Captain," said Rupert, and drew a pistol and steadied it over the crook of an elbow. Down went the off-horse to his shot, and its struggles threw the other, and there was the gate as neatly blocked as one could wish.

"Surrender," roared Wick. "Give up everything you've got, or we'll slit every throat in the town." But there was no officer in authority at the gate to give a command, and the warders and the townsfolk ran away howling through the narrow streets, each thinking first of his own greasy hide.

The pair of them stood in that gateway alone till the rest of the buccaneers came up, and by this time the bells were being rung backwards, drums and trumpets exuding their noise here and there, and all the elements in force which go to make a fine confusion. But buccaneers are not men very easy frightened, and the uproar only pointed out to them the panic of the enemy.

"Now, brethren," cried Wick, "after me at a smart run, and we'll pay a polite call on the Governor's palace. And mind, no straggling. No stopping for bits of plunder on the way. Do as I order, and I'll find you the wherewithal to get drunk for a month on end. And if any dog amongst you disobeys me," he roared, "I'll cut his liver out. Come along, my lord quartermaster," and with that they led the way at a round pace.

But presently it was clear that the troops in the place were being roused and accoutred, and though we cut our way through the first few bodies that opposed us with ease and derision, presently others began to throw up barricades and to man the houses on either side, and the musketry of these galled us shrewdly. There were not so many of us that we could afford to lose men liberally, and Prince Rupert, had he held the command, would, the secretary feels certain, have solved the difficulty by sheer fine generalship. But Wick was Captain, and Wick led the way with a bold confidence. He had no trace of an idea in which quarter the Governor's palace lay, but he thrust out his sword before him and followed it with a brazen courage.

Still at last even Wick could not but see that his small tail of men was being eaten away piecemeal at this disastrous game, and when the Prince

made a suggestion, he was glad enough to follow it.

There was little enough of honour to be found in this rude street fighting and (it seemed) less of plunder. "I've a curiosity to see their pretty church plate," said Rupert, "before the priests can take it away into hiding. What say you, Captain, if we stroll that way now? The sights in this quarter are too commonplace to be interesting."

"It's all one to me, your grace," said Wicks, with his best bow, "and at any rate we shan't miss the way to that. What fools these churchmen are to build towers that can be seen so clear above all the rest of the houses."

Gallantly they charged in this new direction, and like furies the buccaneers fought on in their wake. There was no quarter either asked or expected, and if a man was wounded he must struggle on as best he could, or be content to be left by his friends and get despatch from the ravaged householders who followed at the heels of the fight.

It was at this point, where indeed they were most heavily pressed, and like to have been swamped by sheer weight of enemy, that Master Laughan out of sheer ill-temper at the slights these rude fellows had put upon her during their pre-

vious intercourse, endeavoured to outdo them all in desperation and valour, and indeed won several frank compliments from them which soothed her wounded feelings very pleasantly. For indeed a maid, though she be timid by nature, and need much heart-bracing before she be nerved for a fight, can do with pretty things being said about her sword play as well as other people. And so the fight continued with amazing fury till at last what were left of the buccaneers hewed their way into the great church, and so won breathing space not before it was needed.

The Prince and his secretary and a dozen men stood guard upon the door, and Wick and the rest set to work to glean their harvest. At first they found little enough, and in the exasperation of the moment a good many of the place's embellishments were badly spoiled. But presently they came upon a priest in hiding, and although the poor man at first disclaimed all knowledge of the treasure, he soon sang a different tale when the buccaneers set about sharpening his memory in their rough-and-ready fashion, though indeed he did scream very dreadfully before they induced him to tell.

But in the meanwhile Prince Rupert and his party had been doing their share towards the common weal. A great crowd of troops and citi-

zens had been gathered in the square outside the church, and in two sudden sorties they contrived to capture some two-score of these and drag them back as prisoners inside the defences. There was a fine discrimination of persons in the manœuvre. Each buccaneer seized upon the Spaniard whose clothes struck him as the most rich, in the hopes that he was dressed only as befitted his rank, and in this rude theory there was little error. The silly Spaniards are very strict upon their sumptuary laws.

It was in truth these involuntary hostages which gained the invaders a leave to depart. The treasury of the church had been ransacked to the bare boards, and the plunder made up into parcels convenient for carriage. But every minute the force outside had been growing in numbers and adding to their materials for offence. It seemed a thing impossible that the buccaneers should ever cut their way back to the river's bank and the ship.

But Wick came out and faced the crowd with a brazen assurance.

"Look here," he said, "you people. We've got what we came for and we're ready to go. If you want more fighting, such as you've had a sample of already, by the Lord, we'll give you a belly full. You see this fine gentleman who's

assisting me? That's Prince Rupert, who's come all the way from England to make a bit out here. And let me tell you you don't get a Prince amongst you every day. I'm Captain Wick, whose name you'll have heard often enough before and will again. Now if you're for further trouble, just say the word, and I'll fire this church in twenty places, and you can set about extinguishing it. We've got ten of your biggest men with us as hostages, and if you give us a quiet passage through the town, and let us get on our ship again unmolested, I'll make you a present of them sans ransom. But if you give me trouble, all that these good caballeros will want further at your hands will be ten little funerals. There, good people, there's a civil offer for you, and I want a reply straight and quick.—Inside the church there! Blow up your matches and stand by to fire the woodwork."

That the Spaniards have pride there is no denying, and had those in authority been able to speak their own mind, with such a large body of troops at their disposal they would never have accepted the disgrace of giving safe conduct to the insolent handful of buccaneers. Church and hostages would doubtless have been sacrificed, but at least the pride and honour of those that survived would have been retained to them. But

the hostages had wives and daughters who clamoured shrilly that they should not be sacrificed, and the other women of the place added their voices to the plea, through the dread of horrors which would come very short of an absolute sack, and in the end the men (perhaps in truth glad of the excuse) with a strong show of reluctance, gave way.

Upon which out marched the buccaneers, careless of how near they had been to general massacre, and carrying themselves with their usual sturdy arrogance. Indeed, presently it occurred to one bright spirit that the success of the foray ought by rights to be celebrated by music, and so the pompous dons that were the hostages were compelled at the knife-point to whistle a cheery measure as they marched, and a very droll sight their faces presented to the onlooker.

Now it is hard for the historian of one who, like Rupert, is born by nature to be a leader to be compelled to own that another could supplant him in a leadership, and still bring his campaign to a prosperous issue. Still harder is it to write of the success of this man Wick, whose gentility was aped, and sat upon him untidily; who was indeed a vulgar fellow; and who on occasion got very nastily drunk and made ridiculous an inoffensive secretary like Stephen Laughan. But

the plain truth must be set down that the conduct of this expedition by Wick was by some extraordinary freak of fortune entirely successful; and though a tidy number of the buccaneers were killed, it is not the custom of the survivors to waste superfluous regrets on their late companions. For whatever can be said against the murderous forays of these men, it can never be held that they value their own lives any more highly than they esteem the lives of their enemies.

But the secretary can at least look back with pleasure at a little scene which was brought about by this adventure. The buccaneers marched down the streets of the town always on the keen alert, and presenting a very ugly front and rear. They had a contemptuous distrust for the good faith of the Spaniards. But they were not molested. And in due time they passed out through the watergate, got on board their ship, and then honourably fulfilling their engagement, gave the hostages enlargement, though with some impertinence, requesting that they would whistle them out of ear-shot. Then they poled off from the shore, hoisted their topsails, set the courses and mizzen, and stood out over the bar to sea, and those that were wounded—and these were most—had for the first time leisure to tend their hurts.

But when the bar was passed, and the swells of the open sea once more swung the ship over their breasts, Captain Wick gave a compass course to the helmsman, and took off his hat with a great bow to Prince Rupert, and laughed.

"That direction you've set should take us back to Curassou," said the Prince.

"That's what my navigation intends, your Excellency."

"And to the harbour from which we came?"

"It comes to my mind there's more profit to be got there than elsewhere."

"In the matter of those freights that we spoke about?"

"Why, there you've hit it to a nicety," said Wick, rubbing his hands. "All's fair in love and buccaneering. I still think you made us pay too dear for those passages."

"So?" said the Prince. "Well, there, I suppose, Captain, we shall continue to agreeably differ. For a wager it was one of the Spanish prisoners who saw me bury the stuff."

"You've guessed it," said Wick laughing. "I gave the man freedom for his news."

"Very generous of you," said Rupert laughing also. "And he told you true; I did bury it there. Under three palm trees just at the back of your bivouac, was it not?"

"That's the place," said Wick, "and if your lordship had been as old a buccaneer as me, you'd have gone a bit further off. You trusted too much to our drunkenness."

"Why, no," said Rupert drily, "it seems to me I trusted just enough. In candid truth I reckoned on being seen. In fact, I invited supervision."

"Eh?" said Wick, beginning to look glum.

"Why, you see, Captain, I argued like this: I'd charged for those passages what some might think a high price. I guessed that after you'd had your frolic ashore, some of you would be for getting back a discount; and in the meanwhile, as I didn't know how deep your drunkenness went, for aught I knew some of you might be watching me. So I buried the treasure where I might be overlooked, so as to satisfy the curious, and afterwards, at a quieter time, dug it up again, and reburied it elsewhere. Of course, if you like to take your spades and turn the whole of Curassou into arable land, you may stumble upon my banking-place, though I doubt it; but I think your time could be spent to greater profit elsewhere."

Now there is no doubt that Wick was greatly annoyed at this turn which affairs had taken, but he had the wit to conceal his chagrin. To go back to the island and dig at random would be

mere foolishness, and his crew would be quick enough to tell him of it. For the authority of these buccaneer commanders is in truth shallow enough, and for anything like a reverse, or a piece of policy which does not prove immediately profitable, a captain is deposed with promptness, and another set up in his place. The which would not have suited Wick, who was very big with his position.

So after a meal and a sleep, when the crew were rested, a council was called of all hands to decide upon future movements, and the incident of the passage money was dropped then, and, so far as Master Laughan knows, for always.

But when Prince Rupert was restored to his fleet, he sailed round to that quarter and dug it from the place where it was hidden, namely, in the rough sands of the seashore, where the tide ebbed and flowed twice in the course of each natural day. And so in due time the treasure came to the hands of our gracious king at The Hague, and played its slender part in bringing about the blessed Restoration.

CHAPTER VI

THE MERMAID AND THE ACT OF FAITH

SURELY men were never born with less eye to the future than these Brethren of the Coast, or Buccaneers, as they are more modernly named. Apart from slaying the wild cattle of Hispaniola and bucaning the resultant meat, their two sole industries were fighting and spoiling the Spaniard in the Carib Sea and on the Main, and then frittering away their hard-gotten gains at Tortuga over the wine shops and the hussies of the town, or against the cogged dice of Monsieur D'Ogeron, the Governor, up at his castle.

It was in vain that Captain Wick and that most noble of quartermasters, Prince Rupert, pointed out to the ship's company dazzling schemes for future gain. "They didn't know;" they "weren't feeling greedy;" it "seemed but a doubtful investment," and two or three, more candid than the rest, would be condemned if they took the pains to earn so much as a single piece-of-eight more, till they swilled what had been

got down their thirsty necks. In fine, they were men for whom the morrow was so risky that they had grown to the habit of living only for the day, and it was one of their highest ambitions to have nothing in their pocket, if they should chance to be killed, that would benefit an enemy's purse.

So it was finally decided by a council of all hands to cruise back towards Tortuga, taking of course any gleanings in the shape of laden ships that they might be lucky enough to find on the way, and the poor Secretary's heart sank at the thought. She knew how unpleasant would be the attentions of the nasty hussies of that town to her revered patron, Prince Rupert.

The meeting, however, with another ship of the buccaneers, sailing plunder-wards, put an end to this wretched plan with a pleasant suddenness. She was under the command of a Captain named Watkin, a rude, strong fellow whom the Prince had met before in a humbler capacity. Imprimis, Watkin and his company had themselves just sailed out from Tortuga, and left the place absolutely barren of liquor. This was enough to check Wick's silly fellows at once in their voyage. The newcomers' second argument was even stronger to bring about a conference. They had with them seven casks of rum, the last remainder of the Tortuga merchants' stock, and they invited

all the ship's company to come across for a carouse there in mid sea.

A gale was blowing at the time which would have made more cautious seamen strip down their canvas and get preventer tackles rove. But these reckless fellows argued that if they would have put their ship up alongside an enemy, never mind what weather prevailed, why then there was all the more reason why they should not be timid at rasping bulwarks with a friend when politely invited to despoil him of his liquor. So when due salutes had been fired by both sides, and noise enough made to scare the very fishes, the vessels were forced together, and lay there grinding and splintering and in imminent danger of causing one another to founder incontinently.

With shouts and songs Wick's buccaneers scrambled over the leaping bulwarks, making passes with their sheathed hangers, which the others warded off with black-jacks and drinking horns. And indeed so fierce was their preliminary horseplay, and so shrewd their jesting blows, that two or three pairs drew and laid into one another in hard bloody earnest before the rum casks were set abroad and gave them other matters to think about.

At first it seemed that the ships were to be left to their cuddle, and with the sea running as it

was, and the heavy wind now filling the canvas and now setting it aback, the pair would not have been very long in knocking one another into their primitive staves. But Wick had some shreds of prudence left, and when the Secretary, desperately fearful for her dear patron's life, implored him to take some steps so that they should not all be uselessly drowned there together, the fellow with his own knife cut the grapples that held the ships to their deadly embrace, and made some of the buccaneers pass his own vessel astern at the end of a stout hawser. She rode there dizzily enough and with much jolting and creaking of fabric, but for the time she was beyond doing further damage, and moderately safe from receiving it; and meanwhile the crowd of buccaneers on the deck swigged at the rum, and roared their songs, and laughed and swore at the water which came swilling about their knees when the vessel in her rollings shipped a sea.

It says something for the recklessness of these rude men and their love for carousal that they could have taken part in such a scene. They were in the midst of hostile seas, with no resources but their own for reliance; a gale was blowing that might well have sent timid folk to their prayers; neither crew had (as it turned out) above four days' food between them and starvation, and

yet they held as little dread of the consequences, and put as much heart into the rum-drinking, the dicing, the bawling of choruses, the firing of salutes, and the other ridiculous pranks of a debauch, as though they had been reeling about the wine-shops of Tortuga, or toping in the dinner-chamber of Monsieur D'Ogeron. Night fell, and the wind grew noisier (as is its custom with the dark) and the run of the sea became more dreadful; but none of these things taught them sobriety. Indeed when they had lit the ship with her battle-lanterns, they swore the deck was as good as a ballroom, and set to dancing and capering about, whilst the water which she took over her sides swirled and eddied about their waists.

Only one item in the whole of that horrid night's array of terrors quelled these buccaneers even into a moment's sobriety. A cry, a startled cry, went up that there was a mermaid swimming close abeam, and the song snapped off in the middle of a bar, and the rum cup halted in mid-air. Some crossed themselves, some dropped on their knees and fumbled at a prayer, and a few pious spirits, less drunk than the rest, trolled out a quavering psalm as the best safeguard which occurred to them. There is no doubt but what the courage of all of them was woefully shook, and

the secretary, though indeed she could see no mermaid, owing to the blackness of the night, will ingeniously confess to being at one with them in their tremours.

But Prince Rupert, with his accustomed bravery, rallied the ships' companies into steadiness again. He urged them to pass up powder from the magazine, and get shot from the racks round the hatches, and stand by the guns. And when Captain Wick and the other buccaneer commander chided him, he admitted plainly that he had never heard of a mermaid being shot, but at the same time professed his personal willingness to loose off a culverin or a saker at one if she should come within range. "It's my poor opinion, gentlemen," said he, "that the creatures have never been killed because no one as yet had the impudence to shoot at them. There must be a beginning to all things, and I am quite ready to take the risk of this matter on my own proper shoulders, if indeed I could see the mark. But to tell the truth I have seen no mermaid, and it's my belief there is none."

"They sighted her out yonder, abeam," said Wick.

"So I heard. But my eyes seem of but indifferent quality, messieurs. I've looked, but be split if I can see her. Mind, I offer no cause for

quarrel: I do not say she has not been sighted: I merely say that my own eyes—and I've searched with some scientific curiosity—have not been fortunate enough to make her out. And what's more, I'm looking now and still can see nothing but shadows and water."

Upon which Wick and the other buccaneers took their courage with both hands, and began to look out also; whereupon it appeared that the mermaid had sunk or swum away.

The crews went back to the rum casks little the worse for the experience, but it was plain that Wick was shaken. "It's a warning," said Wick, "and some of us here will have to pay. A mermaid does not come for nothing."

"I am ready to take my risks," said Rupert lightly. "Indeed, if the lady pays us a second visit, I shall hope to see her features more accurately. To tell the truth, Captain, I came out here with some curiosity about your mermaids, and water-monks, and other monstrosities of these seas, and it's beginning to die away."

"What," said Wick, "your lordship's seen some of them and they were not so terrific as you looked for?"

"Why, no," said Rupert, "the fact is I've seen none of them."

Captain Wick dipped up another horn of rum

and nodded his head over it. "Well, your Worship," said he, "here's hoping that when your education on the matter comes, you may not find it too disastrous. Every man who's sailed these seas for long knows what mermaids can do, and I tell you straight that I for one should be the last to anger them. The good Lord grant that the mermaiden we sighted meant nothing bad, though it sticks in my mind that she came as a warning. Here's luck and dry skins to us all," said he, and poured the rum down his throat.

The coming of this mermaid, as has been said, sobered the buccaneers for the moment, but once she was gone again, rum soon washed the memory of her visit from their minds. They roared at their songs till the gale itself was outshouted, they danced about in the seas that swept the decks and tumbled foolishly in the scuppers, and not content with having the ship lit with her battle-lanterns, they must needs set a tar barrel blazing and flaring on the cook's sand-hearth, to the imminent peril of every soul on board. Wick presently was swigging at the rum, and playing the zany with the silliest of them, for it is the custom of many of these buccaneer commanders to curry popularity by joining in all excesses that may be going, and indeed outdoing all the others in their extravagances.

But Watkin, the other captain, was a man of different stamp. He did not spare the liquor indeed, but drink had small effect on him. He was a man who had a mind for many things. As a ship-captain he owned but small experience, and indeed was forced to carry a sailing-master to use the back-staff and the other utensils of navigation. It was more as a woodsman, and a hunter, and an accurate shot that he carried skill. But pre-eminently above these he was a man with a brain enamoured of commerce, and it was because of the handsome and generous way in which he talked of moneys and gains that he had been elected to a captaincy. A man who can speak glibly and alluringly of profits can always find a strong following amongst needy buccaneers.

"Anybody who likes can come round here and collect the dirty coppers," said Watkin. "I've no appetite myself for those small scrapings. And mark you, they're just as hard to get as the bigger things. I've seen Spaniards fight over a cargo of stinking bulls' hides with a fierceness that would have done them credit if they had been defending a plate ship. No, Mr. Prince, my idea is to go out with empty holds (which we've got now) and come back so loaded down with gold bars and plate that the decks are half awash. I've got no use for silks, and shawls, and chests of

dainty clothes. I'm going to spend my time earning good sound silver and gold, or else know the reason why."

"Master Watkin," said the Prince, "in your business ideas you are a man exactly after my own heart. It's clear to me you've got a place that's ready for a visit in your mind's eye, and probably had your plans cut and bucanned long ago."

Watkin sipped his rum and winked. "Well, between you and me, Mr. Prince, I'm no great seaman, and I know it as well as the next man. So I leave sea adventures for whoever wants 'em, and for long enough I've been looking out for a place where one could earn a parcel of honest plunder elsewise. Now mark you, the Spanish towns on the coast are the best guarded, because they are always expecting visits from the buccaneers. So they cost many to storm and sack them. But further into the country the fortifications are built more for the look and comfort of the thing than for real use, because they think that buccaneers are web-footed creatures who dare not venture far away from the friendly sea. So my idea was to find my town inland, but yet not too far inland, because when buccaneers return with their plunder, few of them remain over from the previous fighting, and of these many are wounded

and many are fever-struck, and the rest are well addled with drink, and such a convoy is easy cut up, as previous experience has shown."

"You know the conditions of warfare finely."

"You never said a truer thing, Mr. Prince. Here's to your health again, though I've drunk it before. And now, in your ear, the place that's going to fill my purse is named Coro. It lies just at the bottom of the Golfete de Coro. La Vela's the port, and it's some ten miles away to the Nor'-east and the passes between are sown with gates and forts and drawbridges, all built very superior." He took a small stained chart from his pocket, and unrolled it on the deck beneath the glow of a battle lantern.—"There's the place, Mr. Prince."

"I see. Just on the neck of the Paraguana peninsula. Then, Master Watkin, if all preparations are made to resist entry on the Eastern side, I should say that a call could be made with less formality from the Westward."

Captain Watkin smacked his thigh delightedly. "You've hit it in once. My strategy's this, Mr. Prince. I want Captain Wick to go in front of La Vela, and make all the noise there he's capable of. That will bring the troops tramping down to the batteries and fortifications, and in the meanwhile I with my merry men will work round into the Golfete and land at the West-

ward side, as you have said, and tumble in by the back door with few to stop us. I've taken care," said Watkin with a sly wink, "that there shall not be the full quota of troops in the place when we make our call, or rather I have done my best to that end. But as you'll know for yourself, Mr. Prince, these *engagés* are not over and above reliable."

"*Engagés?*" said Rupert. "I'm afraid I do not quite understand. "Buccaneers' apprentices, do you mean?"

"Just those. They were part of a cargo of prisoners the Lord Protector Cromwell shipped out to Tortuga—cavaliers or malignants he called them, but I am so long from home that I forget English politics now—and Monsieur D'Ogeron sold them to the buccaneers of Hispaniola. They were the *engagés* of these same bright fellows who have shipped with me and whom you see drinking down there on the main deck now; and as they were ours, body and soul, to do with as we pleased, we set them ashore some forty miles from Coro as a species of decoy. Indeed we had only landed them a day before we came up with you, and were standing off and on to give them time to do their work. Their orders were to burn, sink, and destroy, to set up faction fights amongst the Indians if the chance

came in their way, and in fact to do what they could to draw out an expedition from the town. You see my strategy, Mr. Prince?"

"More clearly than your kindness to these *engagés?*"

"Why, what better could they have? it is their bounden duty to make themselves of use to their masters, and if when they draw the Spaniards down about their ears they all get killed, why, by the Lord, they've only themselves to thank for it. They should have learned to fight better. They're not without promise of a fine reward to give them keenness. All who do their work and remain alive, and contrive to join us in Coro when we've took the place, will be given freedom, and made full Brethren of the Coast with due ceremony and rejoicing. Now I ask you, what better guerdon could an *engagé* wish for than that?"

Prince Rupert sighed. "I am a man that's seen a good handful of service, Master Watkin, but I fear I'm not up to the true buccaneer's standard of hardiness yet. And besides, you named these poor fellows as cavaliers, and it sticks in my mind that many amongst them will have been my old fellow-soldiers in the English wars."

"If I were there to lead them," said Watkin,

"'OH, I SAY WHAT I THINK,' RETORTED WATKIN WITH A SOUR LOOK."
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"I warrant I'd come through sound enough myself, and bring a good handful in at my heels. But I'll own they lack a leader. There are several amongst them who have borne officers' ratings, and I dare say could put troops through pretty exercises on a parade ground. But we want something more than mere drill-book out here, as I daresay you are beginning to learn for yourself. For you I take it, Mr. Prince, were once just a routine soldier."

"My man," said Rupert, "I am not given to take offence where none is meant, especially from a fellow who is in his cups, but I'll not have my previous service sneered at, neither will I have unfortunate cavaliers spoken of with contempt."

"Oh, I say what I think," retorted Watkin with a sour look.

"Then, sir, you had better take your sword, and I will do you the honour of crossing it with mine."

Watkin thrust out an underlip. "Mr. Prince," he said, "you may be a big man where you come from, but let me tell you, that you've a lot to learn about New World manners yet. Why, you set up to belong to the Brotherhood of the Coast, and here you're offering to break one of the first rules. Don't you know, '*all private disputes with a Captain, duly appointed, shall be left over*

for settlement till the end of the cruise?' And further: *'Whoso draweth upon a Captain, duly appointed, that man shall be hanged, or put to some such other end as may be convenient?'* Let me tell you, too, there's no buccaneer in these seas that would dare to ride down those rules. Why, our good friend, Captain Wick, that takes such pride in having a man of title beneath him as quartermaster, would be the first to garter your neck with a rope. Indeed, I believe it would tickle Wick mightily if he could brag hereafter amongst the wineshops that once he hanged a *bona-fide*, genuine-made prince."

"Let it suffice that I threw away most of my rank when I came to my present nasty company. But for the other matter, Captain Watkin, as I acted in ignorance of the rules, I am free to acknowledge my error. Your chastisement shall wait till the fitting season, and when it does come, I trust you bear me out that I have not omitted to add due usury for the delay. But touching the present, sir. The flavour of your company is vastly disagreeable to my palate, and I should take it as courteous if you would set me ashore in the track of these cavaliers who are my friends."

"If you want to go and try your hand on the *engagés*," said Watkin sullenly, "you shall be

landed to-morrow. I've had enough of your fine finicking ways on this ship. I'm not Wick."

In this manner, then, was brought about the separation of Prince Rupert from the sea expedition of the buccaneers, and Stephen Laughan, who alone was set upon the shore of the Main in his company, was not sorry to be rid of their ungenteel society, thinking then, poor fool, that nothing could be more disagreeable. The beach on which they were cast was desert; the country beyond, mere forest and jungle; and for inhabitants, there were wild beasts and still wilder tribes of Indians. But somewhere in the country was a band of cavaliers, and after so long a divorce from these old companions, both Rupert and the secretary hungered mightily to come in touch once more with their manners and pretty conversation.

Their chance of finding this band of forlorn adventurers was truly vague enough, but they were not without some trace of direction. "Here is the very spot where I set the fellows ashore," Watkin had said, "and you can see for yourself the fire they built to keep away the mosquitoes from their first camp. Who but raw fools would have advertised their whereabouts with a smoke like that? But this batch always seemed to think of comfort first and consequences afterwards. You see that saw-edged mountain inland? There's

an Indian village in a dead line between the place of the fire and the highest tooth of the saw, and their orders were to make for the village first. It's likely they'll have carried those orders out, or they'll have starved else. They're such poor creatures that they've no sense to find food for themselves, even in a country that teems with food."

This, in fact, was all the real direction that was given, and Prince Rupert was too proud a man to ask for more. The other buccaneers had bawled out wishes for good luck, civilly enough, as the pair were being put upon the beach, though all decided that the mermaiden must have appeared as a special warning to the Prince, and advised extra caution accordingly. The secretary, loving her dear patron so tenderly, and being so nervous for his safety, could not but fall in with this view, seeing that these rude mariners must have learned much of the omens and dangers native to the Carib Sea through sheer familiarity and custom. But Rupert would have it that the thing was preposterous.

"As if a mermaiden at sea could have influence over an honest man seeking profit and adventure ashore," said he. "And furthermore," said he, "I don't believe there was a mermaiden at all." With which brave saying he led the way into the bush, the slim secretary following at his heels.

The track was easy to follow. The cavaliers, with no knowledge of woodcraft, had cut their way through the bush, taking account of neither swamp nor thicket, and though one could not withhold admiration for their bravery and endurance, it was plain to see that they must have risked marching into an ambush for every yard of advance. Their labours must have been terrific. Even following in the made track taxed all the poor secretary's endurance. The air was a mere stew of heat, made still more horrible by the swarming mosquitoes. Serpents and wild beasts threatened one from the forests, and the morasses stank detestably of fevers.

The work had been done at a heavy enough cost. Scarce a mile was passed without coming upon the carcass of some poor cavalier who had fallen, and been abandoned to die, and forthwith became the focus of a covey of disgusting birds. One man indeed they came upon with a tremour of life still in him, and the birds sitting round like ghouls on neighbouring trees. But he was beyond speech, and indeed passed whilst the Prince stooped over him, and when they left to continue their march, the rustle of wings from behind told that the birds had flown down to commence their meal.

It irks the secretary to record matters so vastly

impolite as the above in these memoirs, and indeed many things have been withheld; but in view of the grave events which follow, it is necessary that the desperation of this expedition should be clearly shown. What was the ultimate fate of the unfortunate band of cavaliers that Prince Rupert was following will probably now never be known. That they acted as a decoy, as Watkin had intended, was evident enough, for no less than three large companies of soldiery were despatched from Coro to cut them up. But none of these, so they afterwards stated, came across the raiders, and though they all found their traces, none had skill or endurance sufficient to follow them up. And so it appears that these poor cavaliers were swallowed up by that inhospitable interior which lets not even a rumour of its history escape to the outside world, and whether they were all destroyed, or whether stragglers of them married and settled amongst the Indians, will remain forever a sealed mystery.

But of the two unfortunates who followed in their track, the history of their adventures (though it be merely one of unbroken misfortune) must be given with all its sorrowful detail. Though Rupert would have none of such morbid theory, the secretary, who in most matters agrees with her adored patron to the letter, cannot help

recording that from the moment of seeing the mermaiden luck attended none of their efforts. They were bogged in swamps; they were tormented with the flies; they ate fruits which gave them colics, and suffered incessantly from the fevers which are inseparable from these regions. They were, in a word, half beside themselves with the torments which were native to the country, and if the secretary had been alone, or with any other leader, she is free to confess that she would incontinently have lain down to die five times a day. But Rupert struggled doggedly on, and though indeed he cursed aloud the fate which led him to an end in so detestable a country, and sighed a thousand times for one more wild charge in which he might ride to a genteel death at the head of his English troops, he never lost his valiant courage, and never had aught but cheery, pleasant words for his solitary follower. "Fortune may be blacker still, Stephen, lad," he would cry, "if it can invent a deeper tint, but I'll never give in to you over the matter of that mermaiden."

In the end, however, they marched along in a kind of stupor, exchanging no words, and not possessing even the energy to brush away the mosquitoes from their swollen faces. They struggled on, hand-in-hand, clutching at branches and tree trunks for support as they passed them, and

the maid, by reason of her fierce love for this adorable Prince, put forth powers of endurance which astonish her even now to look back upon. But when at length, in their blind, half-fainting condition they marched directly into a camp of the Spaniards, they were in no fit state for any elaborate display of attack or defence. It is true that Rupert did run one fellow through the lungs, and the secretary's feebling arm did guard her patron's back through fully two minutes from attack. But the outcome was beyond question. Their swords were trundled out of their hands, and they themselves beat to the ground through sheer weight of blows.

Dully they looked for death, and had no spirit left to resent its arrival. A clubbed arquebuse poised over the head of the Prince, a sword was drawn back to stab through the heart of the secretary. But the officer of the troop came up just then, and was more farseeing than his followers. Prisoners from the English buccaneers were scarce, and naturally he wanted to parade his capture; and, after enjoying this pleasant triumph, why then (as he explained) the Holy Office would be gratified to take over the bodies of two such vile heretics, and presently would make them into a very popular public spectacle.

Wrist and ankle irons are part of the ordinary

accoutrements of these Spanish troops, as all Indians they come across they enslave—a very wasteful proceeding, one would think, as the creatures invariably die within the year, and are vastly inferior to blacks from the Guinea coast as labourers. But there the irons were, and quickly the prisoners were made fast and given food and drink, and left to recruit as best they could at the bivouac.

The Spaniards made no further progress with their expedition: the taking of two English prisoners seemed to satisfy their greediest ambition; and when a day had been allowed them to regain strength, the column was put in motion again for a return to Coro. The prisoners were vigilantly guarded, but otherwise they were not ill-treated, for it was part of the captors' plan that they should enter the city looking healthy and vigorous, to give colour to the tale that they had been taken after desperate fighting and resistance. Indeed, the secretary, who, poor creature, was suffering from that seasonable fever which they call the calentura, was given a mule for her conveyance, and had the mortification of seeing her royal patron trudging beside her afoot whether she would or not. But prisoners are not allowed to pick and choose in these matters, and when Master Laughan would have leapt to the ground

in spite of the guards, so that the Prince might ride as befitted his station, the fellows coupled that prisoner's heels beneath the belly of the beast so that submission was a sheer necessity.

The Prince too laid strict commands upon the secretary on this matter. "We're in a tight fix," he said, "and we're fools to have got there. As like as not they'll give us a dog's death of it. But they shall have their sport out of me as an unknown Englishman and not as Rupert."

The secretary urged a reversal of this decision.

"No use," said the Prince. "They would hang me all the same if they knew my quality, only they would hang me higher. I have my miserable pride in the matter, you see. Let me be written down in Europe as "Missing" or "Vanished," if they choose ; but I should die very uneasy if I thought the world was to know how squalid and obscure a noose it was that ended me."

Still the secretary urged the point, saying that all men knew Rupert Palatine, and that even these dreadful Spaniards would not dare to do him violence, but would offer exchange, or honourable enlargement upon ransom. But Rupert closed the talk with sudden heat. "I forbid it and that's enough," he cried. "You grow insufferable with your advisings upon this occasion. And if you want a threat, I'll deny it if you do tell 'em my

name, and curse you with my last dying breath into the bargain. So stick that in your mind, Master Laughan."—With which harsh words he lapsed into a dark, brooding silence, and the secretary, with her heart near to breaking with love for him, was constrained to ride the mule without further speech.

It was the first time that Stephen Laughan had ever seen the Prince thoroughly cast down, and so evidently out of all spirit for the future, and of a certainty their case seemed absolutely devoid of any ray of hope. Truly the finger of the mermaiden was showing itself to any one who was not wilfully blind.

Of that dismal progress to Coro, however, no more need be told. They arrived outside the city's walls on the fourth day at nightfall, and the commandant of the soldiers was torn with indecision. He wanted much to wait outside so as to make triumphant exhibition of his prisoners by next morning's light, and at the same time he feared the Indians who were constantly raiding up to the very walls of the city. And in the end dread of these Indians took the mastery, and the troop gained admittance through the gates, and they had to be content with what drums and a multitude of flaring torches could do to call attention to their show.

There was no limit to the appetite of these Spaniards for triumph. It might have been an army they had captured instead of two fever-stricken weaklings. But no one of those who thrust their heads out from the windows and doorways of the houses cried shame on them for the paltriness of their exploit, and indeed all the town roused to laim ainglorious captors by the name o ıd it their nasty spite at the prisoners. urned out into the streets, and jos liers' heels. Here were a brace of ccaneers, and they lusted to have the them. The smug citizen men would h ed them to a pulp with their boot heels if they could have snatched them into reach, and the horrid women would have torn them like vultures with their nails.

The Captain of the soldiers, however, was not minded that his credit should end with this popular triumph: he was a man with a keen eye to his own promotion, and he was wise enough to know that favour comes chiefly from their idolatrous Church in these Spanish cities. So with laughing blows he and his men drove the civilians back from their catch, and shouted out that they were foolish to hurry matters unduly. "The Holy Office may move slower than your own honoured progress," he cried, "but, *Señores*, believe me, it

is very sure. It will take a vengeance out of these accursed heretics that you may lick your lips to think about, and there is a good chance that the city will be treated to an *auto da fa*. Ho! there, make way! Why do you want to claw a prisoner when presently you will see his skin crackling like a pig's as he roasts on the faggots? Stand back there, I say, or you'll have an arquebuse butt dropped on your honoured toes."

The officer swelled with his triumph and made it linger by passage through many streets, and from out of the darkness beyond the glare of the torches came peltings of stone and garbage which made the procession for the prisoners a very martyrdom. But worse lay beyond. They drew up at last before a building whose horrid taint caused even the callous Spaniards to moderate their shouts and jeers. The officer too changed his bluster to a tone that was half-defiant, half-cowed as he faced the shrouded nameless creature that answered his summons at the gate, and the soldiers of the guard redoubled their watchfulness, knowing full well the desperation of any poor wretch that came within grip of the Inquisition.

Indeed, had a chance been offered, the secretary, through sheer horror of her sex being discovered when handled by the torturers, would have thrown herself upon the weapons of the guard, and so

earned a quick death, even with the dreadful knowledge that to do so would take her away from this princely patron whom she had so faithfully guarded, and whom she so madly adored. But the soldiers were ready for all such desperate attempts, and kept firm grip on the fetters, and when the cowled familiars of the Inquisition took over ward of them, and the doors closed, equal care was shown by these new guardians.

"By my faith," said Rupert, "you do us high honour, *Señores*, with all this heavy escort. Buccaneers must be very lusty blades, or you Spaniards must be nervous by constitution. Why, *Señores*, it hardly stands to your dignity that it should take a round dozen of you to handle a couple of poor wretches that are chained at both wrist and leg."

But the echoes of the cold stone passages gave the only answer to his words. The cowled, soulless familiars uttered no word of a sound.

The sad procession wound down steps of stone, into a long row of dungeons smelling of earth, and of these there seemed an inordinate quantity, burrowed out from amongst the very roots of the city. In most was a dank, cold silence, but two emitted groans from some part of their black recesses, and from one the faint glow of a fire shone out into the alley, and with it came the smell of grilling flesh. But by no word or sound

did the familiars show that they appreciated these things. They pressed on their way with noiseless tread, and held on to their prisoners with an iron clutch. They were most daunting gaolers.

The prisoners were flung together into one dungeon, and the door closed with soft heaviness on their heels. The place was black as the grave, and smelt too like a grave of new-turned earth.

The secretary lay on the damp floor where she had pitched, a prey to the worst despair. But the Prince undauntedly began to make exploration, treading with caution to avoid pitfalls which are common in these places, and not resting till with his hands he had traced out the whole of the walls and the floor. But at last he too flung himself on the ground. "We're built in all ways by cemented stone," said he, "so we need not risk our dignity by trying to break gaol. There's nothing against which we can grind these bracelets from our wrists and shanks, or we'll contrive to make a fight of it somehow and at least die like gentlemen. So we must e'en be philosophers, Master Laughan, and take what comes."

"That woeful mermaiden——" said the secretary.

"Pish! you fool. I tell you there was no mermaiden. It's the mere fortune of war, and it's my one consolation that they can do their ugliest

on me and yet they'll not learn my name. It'll be a sharp time, lad, for both of us when they begin their devilish torturings, but I know you're as staunch as myself, and I thank you in advance for carrying out your service to me faithfully to the end."—And with that he turned on his side and promptly went off into heavy sleep.

To the poor secretary no wink of sleep would bring relief. Death or torture she could have faced bravely; but the thought that her sex must be discovered drove her well-nigh crazy. For consider what it meant: Rupert would learn for the first time that she was indeed a maid, and he would die sickened at her shamelessness in following him, and she would die beside him, knowing that after all that had been endured, she had at the very last lost his esteem and affection.

Wearily the hours dragged on, and how many they were cannot be told here, as there was no means of reckoning them. But at last the door opened and again those noiseless familiars entered, bearing lights. The secretary, poor soul, attempted a jest by way of carrying a brave front. "We think little enough of your inn, Landlord, so far," she gibed. "See to it that you improve the service from now on, or our recommendation will bring you little further custom."

But they answered by no word, and as the

cowls hid all of their faces, there was no way of seeing how they took it. Once more with iron grip these silent men took the prisoners in charge, five familiars to each, and led them out along the passageways.

There was little enough of dignity about the judgment chamber of the Inquisition when it was arrived at. It was just a bare room, furnished meanly with a bench, a table and a curtain. And in the middle of the room the prisoners were drawn up and stood with the familiars, waiting. From behind the curtain from time to time there came the faint rustle of movement, and, in little gusts, the smell of burning charcoal and heated iron.

There is a certain intolerableness about waiting like this when one expects the worst indignities that human ingenuity can put upon one; though that doubtless is part of the calculated cruelty on which this accursed Inquisition coldly prides itself. But Prince Rupert, like the gallant gentleman that he was, had a power of mind that rose above the pinch of the moment. An idea had come to his mind during the night for an improvement in that process of mezzotint engraving in which he was so interested, and calmly and scientifically, with his accustomed clear phrases he commenced to discuss it with the secretary.

There was no mention in his speech of the perils which threatened them, no quiver of fear or annoyance lest his invention should be left incomplete by those who became his heirs. But in that gristly judgment chamber he spoke with as much ease and interest in his subject as though he had been seated giving audience to his artistic friends at The Hague.

But the five familiars who held their clutch on him, and the other five who held the secretary, never for one instant relaxed their muscles, neither did they show by any movement or word that they were conscious that a word had been spoken. They were uncomfortable creatures.

At last, however, the Inquisitors themselves entered, one, a young man, black-avised and sturdy, and two elders whose peaked beards were grey and venerable. A monk in russet brown sneaked in at their heels.

The Inquisitors seated themselves at the bench before the table. The monk stood apart with hands folded over his crucifix and head bent. His lips mumbled as he repeated his office. The younger man took the centre of the bench, and commenced the Inquisition. He spent little time in beating about the bush. "It is reported to me," he said, "that you two are heretics."

"If the definition implies that we are earnest

members of the Reformed Church," said Rupert with a courtly bow, "I accept it, *Señor*, both for myself and my companion."

"So," said the Inquisitor, "you choose to beard us to our faces? Father," he said to the monk, "offer them your holy symbol. Perhaps the devil speaks only with their voices, and with their lips and hearts they may give another answer."

The monk stepped up to the prisoners, holding his crucifix to be kissed, but each in turn shook a determined head. "Neither by word nor sign do I become apostate," said Rupert civilly, and the secretary with an effort made her voice firm and repeated his words.

The monk's eyes gleamed, and he stood back to his place. The dark Inquisitor frowned. "You must know where you are, and you must know well what will be the result of this obstinacy?"

"Yes," said the Prince calmly, "you will next prove that you are brutes and the sons of brutes by putting us to the torture. We shall accept what we cannot avoid, but we shall not turn our religion. I should think shame of myself, *Señor*, if I accepted a faith which was sullied by the adherence of bloody-minded men like yourself."

The dark Inquisitor flushed till his face was almost black. "You shall regret that," he snarled. "I will look on and give directions whilst every

muscle of your body is made to quiver with agony."

"*Señor*," said the Prince with a bow, "you show that you have every talent developed to the full which could be of use to a coward and a butcher."

The dark man leaped to his feet and beat the table a blow with his fist. For the moment he was inarticulate with r But the two older men who sat on the bench ad respect for the dignity of their ce, and ey leaned forward, and in whispers what they could to pacify him. He had a th his passion, and looked as thou he c have struck either of them for their interference; the monk also came forward, significantly raising his crucifix, as though to show that they were assembled there for the purposes of their Church alone; and presently with an angry scowl he sank back again on to the bench, and nodded impatient assent to the whispers.

But if ever the thirst for a cruel vengeance showed in a man's face it shone from the dark Inquisitor's then.

He nodded his head at the prisoners. "Presently," he said, and looked towards the curtain, which defaced one side of the room, with an eye that was ravenous in its hunger.

"It would be affectation to misunderstand you,

Señor," said Rupert in his grand manner. "Presently you will torture me as few men have been tortured before, just to appease your private spite —you that dare not meet me face to face with a sword in your fingers. Your Church should be proud of so doughty a champion, though in God's truth I fear you are forgetting this minute that there is such a thing as a Church."

The Inquisitor winced as though he had been struck, and the dark flush died from his face. He let his eyes droop to the table before him, and kept them there sunk in thought. His face worked with the violence of his feelings. The judgment chamber was steeped in an intolerable silence.

Twice the older men who sat beside him on the bench brought their grey beards to his ear, and whispered. But impatiently he waved them aside. The monk in the russet gown watched him narrowly as though he could read the tumult of his thoughts, and at last, as though to lead them in the path he would wish, kissed his crucifix and reverently placed it on the table beneath the Inquisitor's twitching face.

The man sprung back as though it had stung him, and his face still worked in silence. But at last he spoke. "You are right, father. And you have saved me from a deadly sin. I am not fitted to be an Inquisitor, and after to-day I resign my

office. But for now I am still here, and justice remains to be done, and the honour of the holy Church vindicated. Prisoners," he cried, turning to the two before him, "you shall not be put to the question after our usual methods. From your own lips I will judge you and give sentence. Again, I ask, Are you heretics?"

Prince Rupert shrugged his shoulders. "*Señor*," he said, "you are somewhat wearisome. I have answered that question once already in the affirmative. We both happen to be gentlemen; if you had been one also, you would have known that our honour would forbid us to make change so suddenly."

The dark Inquisitor bit his lip. It was clear that he had quite a mind to flare out afresh. But with a violent effort he controlled himself. The two older men leaned towards him, with evident intention of lending their advice. But impatiently he waved them aside and turned a livid face on the prisoners.

"Be it so," he said. "You shall be judged on that confession. The personal insult avails nothing here either in mitigation or addition to your sentences. Your contumacy is proved beyond doubt, and this Holy Office casts you forthwith from its tender care."

"So that it rids me of your society, *Señor*," said

Rupert, "I care not what others of your devilish compatriots you hand me over to."

"You will be transferred from our keeping to the secular arm, and on the afternoon of this very day you will take part in an act of faith already arranged for three other obstinate heretics. You who hold them, remove the prisoners. And," he shrieked, thrusting himself in an ecstasy of passion half across the table, "if they offer to speak, beat in their faces."

Two of the familiars stepped back, each with a heavy iron bar uplifted in his hands, and under this persuasion the prisoners kept silence. Then the men in charge turned them round and marched them out of the judgment chamber.

Formally they were handed over to armed guards in another part of the building, and these put on over their clothing, gabardines of coarse canvas, named San Benito robes, which were painted grotesquely with flames flickering upwards, and devils in black and red fully equipped with hoof and horn. So the victims were decked ready for the sacrifice.

Nor was the sacrifice to be kept long in waiting, and the secretary stoutened her heart and thanked God that this glorious Prince whom she served was great enough to offer himself as a martyr for his faith, and that she would have the

privilege alone of all those that had followed him of being with him to the last, and sharing his end. The thoughts of pain and indignity were gone; if her sex were discovered during the burning, at least it would be when it was too late to snatch her from death; and so to the last she would avoid shame fro[illegible] the eyes of this great patron whom she so tru[illegible]

The doo[illegible] oop marched out with the [illegible] three other poor wretches w[illegible] y torturings also hobbling [illegible] e. The streets hummed witr[illegible] ndows were gay with sight-seer[illegible] hen they came to the *plaza*, where [illegible] ited up each from its pyre of faggots, there were stands built so that no citizen might miss the spectacle of the day. It may be thought that the present historian exaggerates concerning this: but on her honour, these bloody-minded Spaniards look upon an Act of Faith, (as they term the burning of those who refuse the idolatrous Faith of Rome) as we at home in England look upon an innocent bull-baiting or a dog-fight.

"Keep a bright face, my Stephen," whispered the Prince as they were marched along. "It would grieve me if these curs had the satisfaction of thinking that they had cowed us."

"I could smile," said the secretary, "when I think of the pleasure that mermaiden will feel at having been so clever with her prophecy."

"Pooh!" said Rupert, "you and your mermaiden! I'll never believe there was one, and that's my dying conviction. What think you of my diplomacy, Stephen, with that black-avised Inquisitor? If I hadn't maddened that man into losing his temper, we'd have been writhing in their filthy torture-chamber this minute. However, lad, enough of this sullying talk. Let us turn to that genteeler matter that occupied us before."—And with that he spoke once more upon the elaboration of that process of mezzotint engraving in which during politer days he had taken so clever and abiding an interest.

In due order the five prisoners were marched out into the *plaza* and there under the burning midday sunshine were fastened by chains to the stakes which stood out from the piles of faggots. The audience ceased to chatter; the Inquisitors and the other dignitaries of the city came up and took their places on a high draped dais in due order of precedence; and all was ready for the torchmen to set light to the pyres. But at the last moment one of the three other prisoners, ashen-white, screamed out, "I recant! I recant!" and immediately a monk went to him and re-

ceived his last confession and pronounced absolution. More time was occupied whilst this wretch received the reward of his apostasy, for as is well known, all those of the condemned, that in words embrace the Roman faith before it is yet too late, are privileged to enjoy strangulation before that they are burnt. The which operation of course occupies time.

But at last this wretch was announced to be dead, and indeed hung very loosely in his chains in advertisement of his decease, and the supreme moment arrived. The torchbearers advanced with flame that flickered pale and dizzily under the sunlight, and the poor secretary, who intended to devote these last moments to commending her soul to the Most High, could think of nothing but that disastrous mermaiden who had caused all this anguish and disaster. But Prince Rupert was ruffled neither in words nor confession. "Into Thy hands, O Lord God," he said, "I commend my spirit, with a full acknowledgment of my sins, which be many, and a humble reminder that I have at all times endeavoured to do my duty. O Lord receive my spirit into Thine own place, and punish bitterly these Spaniards that are Thine enemies. Amen."—With which prayer his devotions ended, and he returned again to the grave discussion of those improvements in mezzo-

tint. The secretary does not see that a better proof can be given of this glorious man's greatness of mind. What other creature on earth could bring his attention to such talk when so horrid a death immediately threatened him?

The torchmen were actually putting their flames against the tar with which part of these pyres is daubed, when the interruption came which saved the prisoners' lives for the time being. A horseman clattered into the *plaza* on a half-foundered stallion, crying that the *auto da fe* should stop. The black-avised Inquisitor in a passion leaped to his feet and shouted that what was ordered should be gone through with. But the torchmen, halting between two authorities, plainly dawdled with their work, and the newcomer reined in his staggering horse and threw up an hand for silence.

"Hear me," he cried, "and then say if I was wrong in interrupting. A parcel of buccaneers under Wick and Watkin (whose accursed names you well know) are coming against this city directly. They took me prisoner and set me free to come here and deliver to you their impudent will. They ask no ransom, being confident of their own power of taking what they want, but they hear that you have some of their number as prisoners, and through me they give fair warning that if harm comes to them, they on their part

will burn every prisoner of the Spaniards that they take, regardless of sex or age. And," concluded the messenger simply, "they will do it. They are men that will stick at nothing, once they have passed their word."

A riot of voices filled the *plaza*. It seemed there were two parties in this city. The Inquisitors were determined not to be robbed of their prey, and these were backed up by the fanatics amongst the populace, and by those reckless, cruel few who did not wish to be baulked of a spectacle. And ranged against these were the women and the more responsible citizens, who feared the buccaneers horribly, distrusted the defences, and dreaded that the threatened burning was very near to their own greasy skins as a retaliation. Weapons were drawn, and it seemed as though there would be civil war.

But once more the man on the horse directed the doings of his fellow-citizens. Again he threw up his hands frantically beckoning, and again with some trouble he obtained a hearing. "The captain of the port bid me say," he shouted, "that if he could get his galleys manned, he would go out and tackle these buccaneers forthwith. But at present disease has been busy on the row-bank, and he has few slaves to man the oars. It seems to me, *Señores*, that you have some recruits yon

der chained up against those stakes? Why waste them? And if they are killed by their friends in the ordinary course of action, why the fault lies outside this city, and we get the ordinary treatment of war, whatever betides."

Again the riot of words roared through the *plaza*. But it was clear that the balance of the sides was altered. The proposal of the man on the horse carried weight; the Inquisitors and their fanatics were hopelessly outnumbered and outvoted; and presently the torchmen stamped out the flames, and men came up, and set about unlinking the chains which held the prisoners to the stakes.

Oh God! what a revulsion that respite caused to one! The secretary was well-nigh fainting with gratitude when they unchained her. Life, dear life still was left. Only a slavery in the galleys, lay before them to be endured, only the lash, and the baking sun, and the heart-breaking oar for a sentence after all! It seemed in comparison to those fearful flames which had been so near, to be the gift of some delicious dream.

But Prince Rupert viewed the change in a different light. He saw only the dreadful indignities to which he was condemned, and his pride gave him more torture than the flames could have offered if he had been scorched and burnt to cin-

t horrid stake. His face blackened with
nd his hands clenched and gripped convul-
. "Almost," he muttered, "I am beginning
e credence to your mermaiden, Master
n. The mere fortune of war, unassisted,
scarce have brought me as low as this.
s for me! And sent there by Span-

e secre with a new pain as
heard h the man," thought
she, "that's c t Palatine!"

CHAPTER VII

THE GALLEY

IN all history there have been few more lamentable sights than that of the great and glorious Prince Rupert toiling as a common slave on the row-bank of that Spanish galley. It is true that the Spaniards knew nothing of his rank and position, though their doltishness is proved by their not surmising it from his grand manner and his carriage. But the fact remains that they never so much as guessed at his quality, even when the Holy Office condemned him to the flames as a heretic, and it was his firm command to Stephen Laughan, his secretary and companion in misfortune, that the incognito should be strictly preserved.

"They take me for an English buccaneer," he said, "and I am content with it. I'd liefer be conscience-free as a slave, than Governor of all the Spanish Colonies on the Main and have to kow-tow to their crafty priests. Moreover, Stephen lad, when I throw back on to the oar-loom,

I'm minded that they've left us the use of our limbs, and that's more than might have been. They're clever devils with their torturings, and I'd rather work through life sound as a galley-slave, than sit crippled even in a palace."

So it will be seen that even in this terrible adversity—and on all hands it will be admitted that the galleys is one of the worst of fates—the Prince carried a high spirit: indeed the secretary would not be sure that he did not find some entertainment in the adventure.

The hurry of going on board had been great. Wick and his buccaneers had appeared off the port in two ships with brooms at their mastheads to show that they had cleared the seas, and empty sacks at their yard-arms to hint that they were bent on plunder. Wick it seems had caught a boat load of Spaniards, and had sent them ashore packed with saucy messages which filled the Captain of the Port with rage and fright in equal portions. If Wick had sailed in when he first came up, he would have found the town of La Vela (which is the port of Coro City) practically undefended. But the Spaniards, after their idolatrous fashion thanked many saints that the buccaneers wasted much time in bombast and cautious reconnoitring, and sent for troops from Coro with which they manned La Vela ramparts and batteries,

and which they also set on the four galleys which rolled at their moorings in the harbour.

For the motive power of these galleys, slaves of all descriptions were pressed into service and chained to the benches. Not one in six of these wretches had been to sea before, and the odd five were smitten with seasickness before they had barely settled to their work. But the whips of the boatswains who walked up and down the centre gang-plank were a fine restorative to the feebled minded, and, as the event showed, the slaves were quicker to get over their malady than were the soldiers who partook of no such harsh medicine, and who were put on board to form the fighting element.

The horrors of that first night at sea are well-nigh unspeakable. Wick's ships had drawn off late in the afternoon, and the galleys, so soon as they were manned, put to sea in inglorious pursuit. As a commencement, the slaves had been chained by ankle-cuffs to traverse-bars which run beneath the seat just in the order in which they chanced to come aboard, and as a consequence, though one oar here and there might be passably handled, the great majority were strained at by wretches who knew no trace of rower's craft, and had little stomach just then to learn it. The Spaniards, according to their brutal fashion,

thought to teach skill by the sheer lustiness of their whippings; but these gave little real education, and presently when the galley began to swing to the choppy swells of the Caribbean outside La Vela's protection, the confusion ended in first one, then another, and then others of the sweeps losing a blade, till she bade fair to be completely unrigged if they kept her without change of arrangement.

In the midst of this devil's confusion, with the night come down black about their ears and whistling with wind, and the few lanterns showing a very broken and threatening sea, Prince Rupert, with his whimsical mood, must needs set up a rollicking cavalier's song, to which the secretary (with more of loyalty than prudence) lent her more slender tones for a chorus. Three verses rolled out over the charging swells with as full a lilt and gusto as though they had been sung over the wine-cups in merry England, and some half-dozen others of the galley slaves picked up the rhythm. "To hell with the rebels and God save the King!" they sang, and presently the whips of the boatswains began to crack viciously on the backs of the singers.

But the chief boatswain stopped when he came to Rupert, and stood with whip uplifted. There was something in the Prince's face at the thought

of this last indignity that would have daunted any creature living. "My man," he said, in a terrible voice, "if you touch me with that thong, I will kill you!"

"Pah!" said the fellow, "you are chained!"

"Happily for many on this galley. But desperate men have desperate strength. I tell you freely that if you thong me I'll break any irons you have in the ship like pack thread, and I'll tear the life from your throat with my teeth. Be not a fool, boatswain. You see me here doing all the work that is put on to this oar. Moreover, as you may see from the swirl of the water, and the buckling of the wood, it is an oar that's being shrewdly driven. I mislike the labour heartily enough, but, being a slave, it's my pride to be a good slave, and it seems to me I've earned promotion already. I should be captain of this oar instead of being set on as the middle slave of the five who man it."

"You shall be shifted when the watch is changed," said the boatswain, looking at him curiously. "But I'll give you a double set of irons as an extra present. You are too free with your threats and schemes, my man, for a healthy slave."

"I am as I am made," said Rupert. "No man can change his nature too suddenly. But being on this galley, I've her welfare at heart like your-

self; as I tell you, even a slave can take pride in his work. And let me say to you, *Señor* boatswain, you've your rowers wastefully arranged. Your best men are next the rowlocks, or at a cleat in the middle of the loom, ay, or anywhere but where they should be, and that's at the oars' inner ends, next the gangway, where they could put government over the stroke. As a consequence there's no evenness. Your timekeeper with his gavel might be beating stroke for the seafowl for all the regularity he's causing. And so, although each slave may be working his utmost, no two are getting their weight on it together, and as a consequence the slaves are being strained and tired out, and the galley gathers no weigh. I speak as a seaman, *Señor* boatswain, and I tell you plain that if you don't alter the disposition of your slaves, it's a doubt if we weather the night. You can note for yourself that the breeze is hardening down and the sea's worsening."

The boatswain observed that others of the slaves were forgetting their misery in giving ear to Rupert's tirade, and he pulled himself together. "Silence there," he shouted. "Hold your saucy tongue, slave, or you'll be whipped yet." But what had been said went deeply home to him, for he began looking keenly amongst the benches to see which of the slaves put most skill into the

dreadful toil, and when the gavel stopped beating, and the oars were pulled in and their ends tucked under the central gangway, so that the blades reared up clear of the waves, he went aft to the coach and held a close conversation with the captain of the soldiers.

Presently there was a resorting of posts. A gang of the slaves was told off to the pumps, for the galley shipped more seas than was healthy for her digestion, and these were chained there lest they might cheat the Spaniards of their usefulness by jumping overboard. Then there was more unchaining, as those whom the boatswain had marked for watermanship were unlinked from where they chanced to be, and set each to the inner end of a sweep to govern its strokes. The secretary, to her great surprise (having indeed only a maid's strength to throw into this dreadful labour), was one of those honoured by promotion, and Rupert, who sat on a row bank two behind her across the gangway, gaily cried out his congratulations.

It seemed that no circumstances could damp the Prince during this adventure: indeed one might almost say that his gaiety was unnatural. For presently when food was served round—wine of the sourest, sodden bread, and stinking dried fish that they call baccalhao—he not only ate his

own portion with gusto, but took up also those of the seasick wretches on the bench beside him, and added these scraps also to his meal. "There's work to be done for you and me, Master Laughan," he cried cheerily, "and we need victual within our ribs to keep us lusty. Show me none of your daintiness here, Stephen. Eat soundly, keep up a good courage and a sturdy arm, and I promise you shall dine off sweeter victual when the time comes as your reward."

The boatswain, who was still busy making the exchanges, heard his speech, and understood it, although the words were English. "Now you talker," said he threateningly, "have a care, or you'll earn something more besides those double irons I've given you already."

"Why, *Señor*," said Rupert, "I was but anticipating your kindness and your gratitude. There are slaves and slaves. Surely if we show ourselves to be your best and most valuable slaves, you will give us some small concessions and rewards in return when it comes to the dieting?"

"Your tongue is too long," said the boatswain sourly, "and besides, I don't believe that is what you meant, you Englishman."

"Well," said Rupert, "you might call me worse names that don't belong to me than Englishman."

The boatswain scowled and turned away to his

work, and the slaves tried to get what rest they could where they sat. The deck beneath their feet was covered with unspeakable filth, and even if they had the inclination to lie down upon it, there was no opportunity. Each slave was chained by the ankles to the traverse-bar (or "horse," as it was named) which ran beneath the bench in front, and chained also by wrist-shackles to the cleats on the oar loom. But with the oar-blade a-cock, and the loom drawn in and its end tucked under the gangway, one could snatch rest sitting, with the weary head pillowed on the arms and the oar loom.

But there was a short enough spell of sleep allowed them. The galley fell off into the trough when she had no weigh on her, and with the roll the Spanish soldiers' stomachs reeled within them. So once more the timekeeper sat down to his table and began monotonously to beat with the gavel, and once more the oars were dipped and swung. The rowers might go on till they burst their souls, so that these doughty warriors were eased. But this time there was a better performance. The captain of each oar—those, that is, who sat at the inner ends—were men of experience, slaves many of them of long standing in the galleys, or men brought up to seafaring.

"Mine's the hardest driving oar in the ship," cried Rupert with strange exultation.

"And mine's not the worst," the secretary cried back to him, falling in with her patron's mood.

Two others voices chimed in, both English.

"Silly braggarts, do you think you're doing all the work in the galley?" cried one.

"Foils," grumbled another. "Why tew more than ye need? There's note t'addle by it."

"*Arnidieu*," swore Rupert, "I should know you who spoke then."

"'Appen," said the man, who was at the oar nearest the poop, "I've met a sight o' folk i' my time."

"But you should remember one whom you chose to be your matelot, your camerade on the seas, who was to go a-buccaneering afloat whilst you bucanned meat in Hispaniola. Your voice, sir, tells me that you are Master Simpson."

"Aye, I'm Simpson. And so you're——"

"Hush, sir, please. It is my vanity, sir, to keep my name hid whilst I am in this position. But it grieves me to see you in similar plight."

But here speech was cut off. Once more the boatswain came down on to the gang-plank, boiling with anger at all this talk in defiance of discipline, and cutting right and left with his whip on the shoulders of the slaves. Simpson came in

for a share, and cursed him lustily for the gift, but the Prince he affected not to have caught. Truly it would have taken a braver man than a galley's boatswain to flog Rupert Palatine.

Nothing but constant thonging with that whip kept most of the slaves at their work. The galley laboured heavily in the sea, rolling her outrigged thole-pins under at every lurch, and seasickness groaned from all her benches. The reek of her poisoned the gale. The groans from her might have alarmed heaven. And if a ship of the buccaneers had appeared then, her military manning would have surrendered through sheer misery.

But as it was she rode out the night unmolested, and when morning broke, wild and grey, there were Wick's ships tossing on a far horizon.

Now beating has its limits, and even the arm of a Spanish boatswain may grow weary after a long night of unbroken flogging. Moreover the other galleys had both dropped astern, and lay without weigh with their oars a-cock. So once more the timekeeper gave the three sharp blows with the gavel which meant a halt, and the slaves thankfully drew in the oars, and thrust the looms underneath the gangway. A ration was served out, but for the most part they were too bone-weary to eat, and dropped incontinently off into

slumber. The Prince, however, mastered his meal as before, and the secretary, mindful of his order, made shift to do the same, though indeed her hands were so raw with the rub of the oar, that each morsel was seasoned with her own blood.

For three hours the rest endured, and the sun got up and beat heavily on all the galley held, and then once more the timekeeper beat with his gavel. The other galleys came up and formed into line, sawing over the swells. The whole fleet set off together. They were going out to the attack.

A galley's bulwarks are high, and a slave can see nothing except for swift glances that flash past through the oar ports; but a slave's ears are correspondingly sharpened, and from orders shouted by the officers, and from chance scraps of talk, those on the row-benches gain some general idea of what is going on.

By degrees they rose the hulls of Wick's ships into view, and found that they were hove-to under canvas. They still carried brooms at their mast-heads, and the insulting sacks at their yard arms, and further, as if to show their vast contempt for the force which had come out against them, their crews were at the wash-tub, and the rigging was ensigned with strings of fluttering garments hung out to dry. The Spanish officers gritted their

teeth with rage at the impertinence, and the boatswain was bidden to whip up more speed out of the slaves.

But it seemed that these buccaneers could do other things besides wash their underwear. For presently when we got within range, down went the strings of fluttering garments, and to each man's hand came up his long-barrelled buccaneering piece, with which he fired with diligence and precision. There was no volley firing and there were no wasted bullets. Each buccaneer picked his mark, loosed off, and reloaded. They did not man their own big artillery, but they gave their entire attention to the crews of swaying seasick soldiers that tried to fight the galleys' heavy guns, and they trundled them over almost as fast as they could be replaced. And meanwhile they got their own ships under weigh, trimming sail so that they preserved an unaltered distance from the galleys. They did not attack, and when the Spaniards at all slackened the engagement, a part of them put down their buccaneering pieces and went back to the washtubs. It was a most exasperating battle, and the officers on the Prince's galley were almost beside themselves with mortification.

The buccaneers shot with a fine accuracy, as has been said, but at sea there are always bullets

that go astray, and of these the wretched slaves that were chained to the row banks came in for their share. Some were ricochet shots: some found entrance by the oar ports; but when one is wounded, it is but small consolation to know that the hurt was intended for another. A bullet struck between the two hands of Prince Rupert himself, splintering the wood of the oar. A slave that sat next to the secretary was shot through the temple, falling forward over their loom, and the rowing was much impeded before the poor wretch could be unchained, and his body thrown over to the sharks. Altogether there were twelve of the slaves killed or disabled, but it was some comfort to them to know that no less than thirty of their masters were put outside the combat.

The Spaniards raged at this treatment, but they could not alter it, neither could they come to close quarters with the ships of the buccaneers, and in the end the galleys were allowed once more to drift, and the slaves to rest and regain strength for whatever next might be demanded of them. Twice again during that day did they try to force close action, but the only result was loss to themselves, and in the end when night once more swept down upon the sea, the Spaniards on the galley, what between sea nausea, tiredness,

and despondency, lay in a state that did little credit to their manhood.

Now it is ill work making slaves from men of the calibre of Prince Rupert, because they weigh at its exact value all that's going on, and, resenting their chains very bitterly, are sure to take the first chance of being rid of them. Rupert summed up the situation of the soldiers with much nicety. He summed up also the feelings of the galley's mariners.

It is the custom in the Spanish sea service to keep the two businesses of sailing the ship and fighting her coldly apart. The soldier esteems himself far too great a person to touch anything more ungenteel than his weapons. The mariner is looked upon as an inferior creature, fit only to handle ropes, and the tarry things of shipboard, a proper subject to be oppressed at all times, and beaten when he does not please. On our galley there were but few mariners, for she did little work with her sails; but what there were got treatment but slenderly better than that dealt out to the slaves; and though this was the custom of their service, and they had nothing better to look forward to, the Prince with his shrewd wisdom gave full value to the matter, and when night once more wrapped the galley in gloom, he put a plan that he had formed into brisk action.

One of these sailormen who had undergone more ill-usage than the rest, and had been anointed with more than his share of blows, was passing dejectedly along the gangway, and presently lay down where he was to sleep. There was nothing uncommon about this, for the Spaniards deny their mariners the right to go below into the cabins, and force them to harbour under the weather on the open deck, having an idea that this treatment improves their wakefulness.

To this poor fellow, then, who already had rebellion simmering in his heart, Rupert spoke in a whisper, and his clever words soon sapped the wretch's loyalty. "Why should he toil like a slave that was a free man himself, and no one whit worse than his masters? Why should he put up with blows that were not earned? Why should he be satisfied with a dog's wage and a hog's treatment, when he might make a fortune for a move, and live soft ever after?"

The Prince was persuasive enough, and the fellow was openly willing. "Show me a chance," said he, "and you don't find me staying as I am much longer."

"Then the thing is simple," said Rupert, "and the less time it's put off the better. The key to your fortune is the key of our shackles. You get me that, and I will guarantee execution of the rest."

"I have only your word for it."

"I can offer you a better certificate. Regard my position and my need."

"Ay," said the sailor, "there's no questioning that. But is there to be a general killing on this galley, once you slaves get loose? My own mates are men I like, and it would grieve me to see them hurt. They have suffered from the soldiers equally with me."

"There shall be as few killed as I can help. I need all alive for my purposes. And as for your mates, *amigo*, if they will only bear a hand to help us, the thing will be done more simply. But help or stand aside non-interferent, I swear to you that no sailor on this galley shall be hurt unless he sides in with the soldiers."

"They'll not do that last. But I could not say they'll join with you till they see you've strong chance of getting the upper hand."

"I ask no better. Let them wait till the game is well started, and then join in with the winning side. So hand me the keys."

"Nay," said the sailor, "you will have to get those for yourself also; but I'll go so far as to tell you where they are, and that's in the boatswain's pocket. I'll give you this help, though," said he, and moved across to the other side of the gangway, and coiled up in sleep there.

For the moment Rupert thought the man had been mocking him; but then he saw that the gangway was narrow, that the boatswain traversed it every hour on his official watch, and that the sleeping sailor at the further side would cause him to walk near the other edge, and so within hand-grips of the slaves who wanted the keys. So the Prince sat on his bench well satisfied, and the men near him, who had heard what had been said, waited in silence to get their share of any benefits which might befall. There is no reason to ask the slaves on a galley if they will join an insurrection. That the chance for such a rising may come, let its risks be what they may, is the one hourly prayer of their terrible lives.

The time lingered on with a slowness that was incredible. The slaves in the secret rustled on their uneasy benches and winced as the chains galled them. But still the boatswain came not. It seemed as though the hour for his promenade was twice passed over.

Rupert muttered a jest, that if he came not soon, we should be forced to report him to his superiors for dereliction of duty.

But presently through the gloom these desperate men saw one step from the coach on to the gangway and step towards them. Their muscles grew hardened for the spring, their nerves strung

for fierce fighting. And then, lo! here was a deputy sent to do the formal round, whilst the boatswain himself lay sleeping.

So there was the tedious vigil to be endured a second time. But galley slaves can be patient over a disappointment like this, so that there is shrewd prospect of their vengeance coming if only it is waited for long enough. And in due time the boatswain himself came out of the coach, yawning and stretching, and making his way leisurely along the centre of the gangplank.

It was plain that his eyes were heavy with drowsiness, and he saw little. Indeed he was within an ace of the sailor who lay on the gangway sleeping (or pretending to sleep), and only swerved just in time to prevent stumbling over him. He stepped to the edge of the gangway, cursing softly, and the chain on Rupert's wrist that fettered it to the oar gave just sufficient play for the man's undoing. The Prince grasped his ankle and plucked it smartly from beneath him. The boatswain fell down headlong among the slaves—the slaves whom his whip had so cruelly tortured—and under their vicious handling his natural cries were stifled before they were born. The keys were ripped from his pouch, and passed down the row of benches, and callous, blistered fingers trembled as they fitted them into the

locks of the shackles. The sweat of anxiety poured from the slaves during those minutes as they fumbled.

A voice rang out through the rustling night that called for the boatswain. There was no reply. Again the voice called, and this time it was answered by a laugh. Prince Rupert, once more a free man, stepped up on to the gangway. The secretary followed him. They made their way aft to the coach where the officers of the soldiers lived, and other shadowy figures, first by ones and twos, then in mobs, began to move on at their heels. There were no cries, there was no shouting; but the very silence of these ill-used slaves made their onset all the more dreadful. The officers and the soldiers welled out like angry bees from an upturned hive to meet them.

Both Rupert and the secretary were happy enough to filch swords from soldiers that were barely awake, and with hands once more gripped on their accustomed tools, were able to make pretty play. But the great mob of slaves that came on at their heels found no such genteel weapons; contented themselves with stanchions, belaying-pins, balustrading, or anything which offered itself to the first sight; or else raged horribly with bare teeth and talons, as though they had been wild beasts unaccustomed to more

human warfare. There was no display of fencing skill. Their one manœuvre was to rush in to hand-grips and commence a deadly wrestle.

There was no doubt about the slaves' ferocity. Numbers of them were killed, but even in their death-writhings they generally managed to pull their man down overboard with them. Their numbers and their rush were unconquerable. And, besides, the Spaniards were still nauseated with the defeat of the afternoon and with sea-sickness.

As more of the slaves got loose from their shackles the battle degenerated into mere slaughter. The wretches were men no longer; they were wild beasts mad with the lust for blood. They had forgotten the meaning of the word "quarter"; and when here and there one of the soldiers threw down his arms, crying that he surrendered, they simply ran in and finished him, with laughter at his foolishness.

But it was no part of Rupert's plan to let capture and punishment degenerate into massacre. That there were men on the galleys who had been buccaneers before being taken as prisoners by the Spaniards, has been mentioned already. And it appears there were others. It was the pockmarked Yorkshireman, Simpson, who told of them.

This man Simpson came up to Rupert when he and the secretary were defending against some of the maddened slaves a handful of soldiers who had surrendered. "What d'ye bother yer head about yon carrion for, young feller?" said Simpson. "They're nobbut Jack-Spaniards, and they're far better ower t' side an' into t' watter."

"Why," said Rupert, "I was thinking of them as substitutes for ourselves on the row bank. Someone must man the oars, one supposes, and I've no special ambition to go back to the work again myself."

"Nor me. I've been making t' beggars pay pretty dear this last few minutes for the wark they've had out o' me on this galley. But tha'rt right, young feller, there must be no more killing. It's a fooil's trick cutting off yer nose to spite yer face."

"Help Master Laughan and me to hold off these savages then."

"Right," said Simpson, and began in his great bull's voice to call out names. "Jobson! Hugh! Drapeau! Makepeace! Lebreton!" he shouted for, and then named others, and presently these men worked their way up through the rabble of the Spanish slaves. With the Prince and the secretary they made a line across the poop, beginning at the rudder head, and then with word

and blows with the flat drove the maddened Spanish slaves forward away from their killing, and passed all living unarmed soldiers they met with behind them.

Presently these slaves began sullenly to listen to reason, and though they were far from seeing the justice by which a small knot of men, who shortly before had been slaves equally with themselves should set up a command, they understood that these few who drove them had once been buccaneers, and so they resigned themselves to their superiority. So quickly order was restored; the dead were put over the side, the soldier-prisoners were clapped into the vacant chains and bidden acquire the mystery of oarsmanship; and the sailors of the galley who had stayed non-interferent and unmolested, returned to their accustomed duties without being especially bidden. They were rather poor-spirited creatures, these same Spanish sailormen.

It remained to elect a captain and a course, and this was done with small argument. The Yorkshireman Simpson took upon himself to make nomination. "Bretheren," he said, "and scum, just listen here, all o' you. This 'ere young feller, that's planned this rising is a Prince, an' 'e's my matelot. I therefore propose 'im as Captain. If there's any beggar as 'as any objections, let 'im

just step here an' I'll cut 'is throat.—No one's onything to say to that? Well, young feller, tha'rt elected Captain, pleasant an' unanimous, an' we all serve under you according to the rules of the Bretheren of the Coast."

"Gentlemen," said Rupert, "I thank you for the honour, and will endeavour to deserve it. I believe, according to the Rules, my first duty is to call a council of all hands, and I do that herewith. But before there is time used up in speech-making, I should like to point out that we may be called upon for further action presently. There has been noise enough made on this galley to scare heaven, and I do not see very well how her consorts can have avoided taking the alarm. Presently one supposes they'll come up to see what the uproar's about, and we should be able to give them their answer in due form."

"Let them come," said Simpson, "we'll give them all the fighting they've any stomachs for."

"But to what profit, Master Simpson? We shall simply kill a parcel of soldiers whose trade it is to be killed, and the Spaniards ashore will only shrug their shoulders, and say the poor fellows have merely received what they were hired for. Now my grievance is more against those said Spaniards ashore, and moreover, I am remembering always that I came out to these seas to gather

revenues for my master the King, who now keeps his court at The Hague."

"Kings is note to me," said Simpson with a frown, "an' I'll bet they're no more to onybody on this galley, unless they're a fancy of Master Laughan's."

Rupert laughed. "Well," he said, "we're far from England now, and I won't pick a quarrel with you over your disloyalty, Master Simpson. To begin with, we've other matters on hand. And to go on with, I've an opinion that we agree shrewdly over the other point of my argument. You'll have as little distaste for plunder as anyone, eh?"

Simpson smacked the Prince's shoulder. "Tha'st hit it theer i' once, young feller."

"Your approval overwhelms me. Now here's my plan. We'll give these other galleys the slip, and be off back to La Vela as fast as the oars can drive us. They'll know this galley there as their own, and will let her into the harbour unquestioned——"

"By gum," shouted Simpson, "I see t' plan. Let's away wi' us, an' we'll talk it through as we go. We shall loss a fight wi' these 'ere other galleys, but we shall have all we want in La Vela harbour before we've got our pickings there an' are off again. That carrack against the mole has the plate in her of half a season's gathering."

It took little formality to get the galley once more into motion. The whips of the late boatswain and his mates were picked up by ready hands, and any stubbornness which at first the new slaves chose to show was soon flogged out of them. There were not enough soldiers remaining alive after the vessel was taken to full man the oars, and perforce some of those who sat on the benches before had to return to them. But these freedmen pulled at oars apart, and soon there sprang up a rivalry between them and the boatswain who drove the new-made slaves—the which was bad for the slaves.

Quickly the galley got into her stride again, swerving in a wide circle under the helm, and then heading back for the Main. The Spaniards had not lit her great poop lanterns that night for fear lest Wick should play some buccaneers' surprise game under cover of the dark; and unlit they remained after she was captured; and if the other consorting galleys came to hunt for her, they never arrived, and there's an end to them.

One other talk Captain Prince Rupert had with his crew before they came up with their new work. "I tell you plain, gentlemen," he said, "that I am out in these seas of the New World to make what monies I can add to my King's

revenues, but at the same time one's own private honour must be attended to first. Now I want an agreement from all hands as to where the profits of this venture belong. For myself and Master Laughan here, we were of the company of Captain Wick and Captain Watkin, and were put ashore (so it was said) to forward their plans for sacking the City of Coro. It is a marvel, for which I thank God heartily, that we stand here alive and free to-day, and as those two buccaneer commanders must have known to what horrible fates and dangers they sent us, I take it they wrote us off their strength as dead the moment we left the ship. So I hereby dissociate Master Laughan and myself from their venture, and proclaim ourselves, so far as they are concerned, to be gentlemen at large. Remains for myself a contract I once made in Hispaniola with Master Simpson."

"Nay, young feller," said Simpson, "that's off by my own unavoidable act. We agreed that you were to be my matelot at sea, sharing equally all you addled, and I was to be your camerade ashore, with a business of hunting the wild cattle of Hispaniola and bucaning the meat, selling it in Tortuga, and sharing with you the gains. But I must needs be gowk enough to get caught by the Spaniards, and so, as I say, the bargain's off.

So we're all here on our own bottoms, and all that's needed is to settle the share list."

The debate about this was simple. Rupert, as Captain, was to have fourteen shares. Simpson was appointed Quartermaster with eight shares, Drapeau, a Frenchman, was made gunner with four shares. The other French and English buccaneers, including the secretary (who to her mortification was offered no official position) were apportioned two shares apiece, and the Spaniards, who had been their fellow-slaves, were each given one share. These last were for making some disagreement; but it was soon pointed out to them that the French and English as a rule gave Spaniards nothing, and that if there was much fuss about the matter, they would adhere to their usual habit. The which suggestion calmed these greedy gentlemen down wonderfully, and so all within the galley was peace and concord.

Day came, and the galley found herself alone on a desolate sea. The coast of the Main was visible from the deck, the buildings of La Vela could be seen from the mastheads; and so the oars were cocked and the day was set apart for a rest which all most sorely needed.

"There's a bit of the Puritan about thee, young feller," said the Yorkshireman to the Prince, and Rupert laughed and said that Master Simpson

was the first to guess it. "But I know what you mean," he added. "I'm suggesting sleep and not debauch, and although you can barely keep your eyes open, you're resenting the innovation. But let me call to your notice that this is a dry ship. I've had her searched for liquor and there's barely a cask, and that's only of sour, thin wine; and so we've to be sober for the strongest of all possible reasons."

At that the buccaneers laughed and gave in, and after a watch had been set, all in the galley addressed themselves to sleep. They lay about, some below, some on deck, some in the shade, some in the sunshine, and the slaves of course rested on the oars to which they were chained; and sounder sleep this side of death it would have been impossible to find. Indeed, one may say that all on the galley were thoroughly worn out with what they had gone through, and that much more wakefulness would have had the dreadful effect that want of sleep produces, and sent many of them into insanity.

But night came at last, dropping on the sea with its accustomed tropical suddenness, and with night the galley woke. The timekeeper gave a preliminary beat with his gavel, and the oar-blades splashed down into the sea; he gave two more beats in warning, and then set off, marking

a steady stroke, and the oars followed him with all the accuracy of which they were able; and presently the galley was in full course, heading back for La Vela. On the poop stood Prince Rupert explaining patiently in English, and again in French, and still again in the Spanish tongue, every small detail of what was to be done in the harbour, and apportioning to each his especial work. Wick's ships were demonstrating opposite this port to lure down the greatest possible number of troops away from the defence of Coro, so that the capital might be as feeble as possible against Watkin's attack. Rupert's was to be a sally in against desperate odds, and nothing but the most perfect method and order could bring it success.

The very noisiness of the galley's approach was its most efficient disguise. The timekeeper beat stolidly with his gavel, and after the manner of the Spaniards a drum and a trumpet made music on the head of the forecastle, doubtless causing many ashore to turn in their sleep and curse at being disturbed by so barbaric a formality. If the galley had tried to sneak in between the harbour walls with oars muffled and all within her quiet, she would have been spied by the sentries, and they would have filled the place with suspicions and alarms. But from her arrogant nois-

iness none dreamed that she had changed owners, and the sentries patrolled their beats without giving her more than a glance.

One of the new-made slaves did indeed more with bravery than prudence try to shout a warning when they came within earshot of the forts, but the galley's sailors were watching narrowly for an outbreak such as this, and scarcely had the fellow opened his mouth to shout, than a slash with a dagger silenced him for always: which example effectually schooled the others. Those sailors of the galley were not brave men, but they were very frightened, and that made them very efficient guardians for the slaves.

The galley's berth in La Vela harbour was alongside the arsenal, but orderliness in these Spanish ports is a thing little thought of, and when this particular vessel steered towards the fort which commanded it from the opposite side, she received no special attention. A low wharf gave her landing place, the oars sweeping above the pavements; and the moment her side rasped against the stone, she vomited forth her people in a sudden rush. A great carrack lay beside the next wharf.

Then and not before was the alarm made. A sentry squibbed off his arquebuse, the ball flying wide. A drum beat, followed by a rumble of

other drums. Lights kindled in the windows and embrasures. The clatter and shuffle of men arming themselves hummed up into the night. But in three bodies the invaders had gone off under Rupert, and Simpson, and the secretary, at their fastest run, and the galley, in charge of the French gunner, put off again in obedience to her orders.

The three shore parties had a simple duty. Each in its ranks had a parcel of men armed only with spike-nails and extemporised hammers, and it was the duty of the others to burst into the forts and shelter these men whilst they spiked the guns. Every moment the town and the garrison were waking round them: every moment that the work was incomplete it grew harder of execution.

There was to be no lingering once the guns were spiked; there was to be no staying to fight where it could be avoided. "Keep the lives of your men if you can," Rupert had said as a last command, "or you will lose me half my profit and half my revenge."

For a rendezvous, all were to make for the carrack.

Shouts and screams and oaths told when each party stormed the fort which it was bidden put out of action. There was some fire from small arms, but not much; most of that night's work was done with cold steel and the hammer. Of the

"THE SECRETARY WAS OCCUPIED IN LEADING HER OWN."—*Page 245.*

progress and fortune of the other two parties, the secretary could see little; she was sufficiently occupied in leading her own. The men who were chosen to be under her had grumbled at first at having such a stripling set over them, and the poor creature had to look her fiercest at them for fear lest they should openly mutiny and appoint another leader on their own responsibility. But once they had clambered inside the fort apportioned to them, she summed up a courage brazen enough to suit the most reckless of them. The hammer men, being unarmed otherwise, were nervous and clumsy, and seemed a most tedious time over their employment. The garrison poured out against them like bees from an upturned hive. And when eight of the twelve guns were spiked, a cry rose that it was time to be going, if any were to escape back to the carrack with their skins. But Master Laughan with tongue and sword stopped the panic (and indeed fought very valiantly for example), and a space was cleared round the remaining guns till the hammer men had stripped the tarpaulins from their breeches, and put them out of action. And then when indeed the work was over, and word was passed to make evacuation with all speed available, the secretary was the last to leap on the parapet and drop down over the wall.

Missiles and some shot flew after them, but they had no means for reply and indeed had been strictly ordered by the Prince to use their heels; and so dragging along their wounded, and leaving their dead, they raced on in a body through bye-streets and lanes, but always keeping in touch with the harbour-edge. Around them the town was ablaze with lights and fury, but in the hurry of their passage no man knew them exactly for what they were, and by the time any had guessed, they were out of shot and shout. It is useless to cry, "The Buccaneers are on us! The Buccaneers!" when all the town is thrilling with the same alarm.

But one deed the secretary did in La Vela which was outside Rupert's instructions, and indeed opposed to his strict command. There came down upon her band from one of the side streets a black-avised man mounted on horseback. She recognised him at once. He was the chief Inquisitor for Coro of that truly horrid institution of Rome miscalled the Holy Office, and with his own vile lips he had sentenced both Rupert and the secretary to what they call an *auto da fé*, but which in vulgar terms is nothing more nor less than a burning to death at the stake. Only the pressing need of the galleys for rowing-slaves gave them salvage from this, and for that they had to

thank Captain Wick's activity, and not the Inquisitor's will. In fact they were beholden to him for so little, that Master Laughan forthwith broke orders, bade her men surround the fellow, and drag him from his horse. The reins of his own bridle served to bind his hands, and when in his black rage he would have halted to argue, shrewd sword progues quickly made him keep station. "Here is a nobleman for ransom," the secretary said to her buccaneers, and they swore they would be cut to pieces sooner than let him escape them.

With furious pantings they drove their way on through the streets, and at last came to that broad avenue, littered with barrels, cases, bales and other merchandise which heads round the inner bight of the harbour, and there they saw the stately carrack which had been ordered as their rendezvous. Already she was the centre of a pretty fight. The Prince's men and Simpson's had boarded her some minutes before, and her own people were resisting with fury and desperation. But at the run Master Laughan's came up, clambered over the great precipice of the stern, and so came upon the poop, which was the last hold of the Spaniards. Her people thus found themselves between two sets of swords and had no further stomach for fighting. Some jumped down on to the quay on one

side, some were forced over into the water on the other, and there was the great carrack in alien hands, and buccaneers with axes were cutting through her shore-fasts. But Master Laughan had one piece of merchandise to haul on board yet, and that was the black-avised man whom she gave orders to carry below, and set two of the freed slaves to guard.

The galley, according to orders, backed up, passed a warp on board over her stern, and began to tow towards the harbour entrance, and all those who had any ship-knowledge on the carrack laid aloft to loose her canvas. From the dumb batteries the garrisons raged as they wrestled with their spiked artillery. And in the meanwhile a smattering harmless fire from arquebuses filled the night with flashings.

Gradually as her courses were let drop and her topsails hoisted, the carrack gathered way, and presently she passed out between the harbour heads. Clouds slid away, and showed a moon sailing in the heavens. The noises died out in the town, and one could guess that its people were watching the two vessels which sailed out over the lighted sea. The carrack trimmed deep in the water, and already expert valuers had been in the holds and reported her cargo of fabulous value.

"Young feller," said Simpson, "or rather I should say Captain, it's my belief we've run off with their annual plateship. Tha'st set us up for life."

"I had two motives in visiting the place," said Rupert, "profit and revenge. You say we've done well with the first, and that is pleasant hearing. But I should have liked to see my way to making the second more marked. I've suffered some vile indignities in this neighbourhood."

"Your Highness," put in the secretary, "I've flatly disobeyed your orders during this last half-hour."

Rupert looked at Master Laughan queerly. "Then I'll lay to it you've got some good excuse."

"Why, yes, your Highness, my excuse is in one of the after cabins under a steady guard."

"Fetch it up under the moonlight here."

The black-avised Inquisitor was brought on deck. "You!" said Rupert, and set his lips tight.

"The tables appear to be turned," said the fellow boldly. "I suppose you will use your power now and torture me."

"That is not my way," said Rupert. "But I am apt to return kind for kind, and I have in memory that you condemned me to the flames,

and that it was not your fault I did not suffer in them."

"I regretted then and regret still you were not burnt. I took you for a heretic, and it seems you are a pirate also."

"It seems to me that I am Rupert Palatine, and acting very naturally. My man, next time you gather victims for your bloody Inquisition, see that you do not fly at too high game. If you were a gentleman, I would set you free with a ransom. But I see you are a common fellow, and need a ruder lesson. Put down your helm," he ordered to the steersman, and to the sail-trimmers he said, "Lay her to." And then he gave further commands which pleased all hands mightily. The galley was brought alongside and set thoroughly on fire, and the black-avised Inquisitor was put down on to her decks with his wrists once more set free. The warps were cast off and the carrack once more got under weigh. Rupert hailed the Inquisitor from the poop.

"You will find the keys of the slaves' shackles on their proper nail inside the coach, and you may set your rowers adrift as soon as you please. Then I would counsel you to make for the harbour, which you can do with ease before the fire scorches you very deeply. But remember from this night's work that fire burns, that men who

have had you in their power could still set you free again unharmed, and be generous to the next poor wretches that come within the grip of your Inquisition."

The black-avised man took off his hat and bowed. "I shall pray nightly to heaven, *Señor*, that I may meet you once again," said he, and then turned to get the keys of the rowers' shackles.

"I'd like to bet tha' that tha'st trouble with yon dark chap yet," said Simpson thoughtfully. "It's allus best to scrag these Jack-Spaniards whilst there's t' chance."

"My dear Master Simpson, one must always remember that there's such a thing as chivalry left even in these seas of the New World."

"I know note about chivalry, young feller, but I'm thinking that 'appen we've some of yon beggar's brass in this vessil we're running off with, an' that's what makes 'im mad. I tell tha', Captain, it's brass i' the end that makes all the wars and the fighting in this New World, just the same as it is i' t' Old. There's men gives it other names; some says they fights for religion, and some for drink; but reckon it out right to t' bottom, and tha'll find it's t' brass an' note else."

"You're a philosopher, it seems, amongst your

other attractions," said Rupert, smiling. "But at present we must give these nicer matters holiday. Here we are, with a fat ship, and the business of carrying her away in safety; and I want very much to do that without giving toll to either Captain Wick or Captain Watkin. Let them go in and sack Coro, as arranged; these Spanish towns are the proper banks for the buccaneers to draw upon. There's plenty of pickings left for them. But for myself, I'm mightily anxious to carry away without further debate what I've so honestly and hardly earned."

They watched the galley furiously rowed towards the harbour with red flags of flames trailing from her stern; they saw the black dots which represented her people scramble over the side; and presently they laughed as they saw flames sprout from other shipping in the harbour which blazing matter from the galley had set alight. And they felt a very pleasant glow of satisfaction as they watched. From then onwards, until two days were passed, all the brain in the carrack was employed till she was clear of possible danger, and not until then did Rupert formally thank the secretary for capturing the black-avised Inquisitor.

"If I had not settled my score with that man," said Rupert, "I could not have slept easy. But

as it is, I think the adventure has very satisfactorily ended. My lad, when the time comes, I will commend you very highly to his Majesty the King at The Hague."

CHAPTER VIII

THE REGAINING OF THE FLEET

NOW during all these weary adventurous weeks in which he had been wandering about the Caribbean, more like a humble knight-errant of old than a modern prince of birth, Rupert had never forgotten that he had pawned the King's fleet to that detestable person, Monsieur D'Ogeron, the Governor of Tortuga. On what employ it had been used, no rumour had reached him. But the period for which it had been pawned was near to run out, and Rupert was anxious to resume command on the first day it was due to be surrendered to him.

The voyage back from Coro in the newly captured carrack could not be direct for many reasons. In the first place there was plunder from his other ventures to be collected, and this, after the buccaneer fashion, Rupert had buried in spots known to himself alone, and in the second place, in the hurry of cutting out the carrack from La Vela harbour, no one had troubled to notice that she was not victualled. They had

been keen enough to note the treasure and the rich merchandise which trimmed her so desirably low in the water, but it was not found that she lacked the necessary vulgar details of grain and dried meat, of wood and water, till she was well at sea, and these were not to be had for the mere asking. Consequently the crew were well-nigh starving before it was found possible to put into a river which supplied fish for an immediate meal, and offered savannahs on which the hunters shot deer meat to take them further.

But even this supply did not provision them for long, and they were forced to run across to Hispaniola, come into touch with the French and English hunters there, and buy from them buccaned cows' flesh in the usual way. There is a routine about these matters, and when it is departed from one soon finds that the routine has its reason for being.

It will be seen that here were all the makings of a voyage which would be prosperous, if somewhat slow; but it must be owned that all was not peace and easiness. The Spaniards on board were the root of the unpleasantness. They held that they had worked equally with the others in gathering the plunder. The French and English held that they were duly-admitted members of the Brotherhood of the Coast, and therefore of

superior clay to any Spaniard; and, moreover, when it came to the distribution of the plunder, they attended armed to the teeth and certainly took the lion's share. They said at the time that the Spaniards might feel grateful that they were given so much as a flavour; and on that day, being overawed by weapons, these Spaniards accepted what was left for them with at least an outward show of civility. But it seems they still carried rage and discontent in their hearts, which indeed is the custom of their disgusting nation, and from then onwards were forever making a great plot or cabal.

In number these Spaniards might well be vainglorious, seeing that there were one hundred and forty of them, to some twenty-seven all told of the buccaneers, and in fierceness they were above the ordinary. They were criminals all of them, condemned to the galleys by their own countrymen, who found them intolerable at home, and had it not been that their liberation was useful at the time to Prince Rupert, one is free to confess that the galleys was their proper place, as they were unfitted for any other rank in society. However, there they were on the carrack, possessors of some considerable store of plunder, and very wishful to seize more and to have a say in their final destination.

Once indeed a deputation came aft to put forward their views.

What was to be the carrack's destination?

"Tortuga," said Rupert, civilly.

They appeared to hear the name with consternation.

"But, *Señor*," said their spokesman, "that is the metropolis of the buccaneers."

"To me," said Rupert, "Tortuga is my rendezvous with my own fleet."

"We bow to your esteemed convenience, *Señor*. But what chance shall we have there? We shall be lambs in a wolf-fold. They will rob us certainly; if we escape out of the place with our lives, we shall be fortunate. Surely, *Señor*, as we have borne much of the burden of the fighting, we are entitled to some say in future schemes."

"As duly elected Captain, all decision in these matters appears to rest with me. But I do not wish to make my command unpalatable, and if what is arranged, and what indeed suits the French and English of this crew very pleasantly, goes against your sentiments, I am willing to come to a composition with you. Once in Tortuga, I personally and Master Laughan here rejoin my fleet; Master Simpson and the buccaneers go ashore, according to their convivial custom, for a merry time amongst the wine-shops and the ladies

of Tortuga, and possibly for a turn at the dice box with Monsieur D'Ogeron up at the castle; and the carrack will remain for sale. I believe prices for ships rule easy in Tortuga, as there is somewhat of a glut of them on the market, and the titles to them are obscure. Here, then, is your chance: you are men of capital; hand back into the store the plunder that has been shared out to you, and the carrack is yours after she had carried us for our voyage."

At this proposition, the Spaniards appeared to get very angry, and indeed were for making some foolish demonstration if they had not been incontinently driven away forward. But the buccaneers, who have a more nice appreciation for wit, laughed heartily, and swore that Rupert was a prince of good fellows. But at the same time they did not take the Spaniards too much on trust, and in fact wore their weapons and their wakefulness with great diligence.

Had there been liquor on board it is a sure thing that the buccaneers would have drunk themselves silly, and the Spaniards, who are too feeble-stomached for an orgie, would not have failed to use their soberness to bring about a massacre. But, as has been said, the carrack was a dry ship; she was carried off with neither wine nor rum in her store; and to this alone may her safety be cred-

ited. Indeed so especially keen were these thirsty buccaneers to arrive at Tortuga and commence their debauch, that they employed extra watchfulness to make sure no impediment came in their way, and by this means alone discovered the hateful plot which the Spaniards were hatching against them.

There was amongst the Spaniards it seems an apothecary, who had earned a certain ill-omened fame. The city which he polluted by his residence contained husbands who wished to be rid of their wives, and wives who had tired of their husbands. The apothecary supplied the means; indeed it was the wretch's boast that he had plied this horrid trade of poisoner for ten whole years with immunity, and then got found out only by jealousy of a business rival. Indeed so large was his circle of patrons, and so strong his power, that even at his trial he was used leniently and spared the torture, lest he might tell too much, and in the end was condemned only to the galleys, when he should most justly have been slowly burned.

So when a plot was formed against the buccaneers, here on the carrack was a task in his old trade ready to the apothecary's hand, and that was no less than to kill outright by poison all who were not Spaniards. It seems there was a parcel of herbs and roots and snake's teeth

amongst the cargo suited for his purpose, and he got hold of these, and set about making his tinctures and decoctions. Even then he might have succeeded, if he had done his work quick and sudden after the plot was made; but it seems that there can be artists amongst poisoners as there are in other trades, and here was one that took a most dainty pride in his horrid craft. A crude, rasping poison would not suit him. He must needs purify and distil a dozen times over till he had made a death drug of the most exquisite fineness; and his hundred and forty compatriots who were all in the secret, sat round and watched and gloated over their coming triumph and vengeance.

What made the deed one of such plain simplicity was the manner in which the two parties had separated themselves. From the very first day on board, the English and French buccaneers had taken the cabins that are set apart for officers and passengers under the half-deck and poop; and the Spaniards did not presume to harbour anywhere except in the forward castle, or the upper holds. There is a sea sumptuary law or etiquette about these dispositions that is very strict. Moreover, gradually as the feeling between the two bodies became more strained, there was less and less intercourse between them. Indeed, by

Rupert's direction, the buccaneers posted constantly a couple of armed sentries on the break of the poop with a loaded culverin by each, trained so as to sweep the waist and the lower deck, and with lighted matches in tubs standing by their side. The sentries were changed with every watch, and the Spaniards knew quite well that they would fire on small occasion. And moreover, after nightfall, battle-lanterns were hung in the rigging, so that there should be no rushing the after deck under cover of darkness.

The matter that gave the apothecary his opening was a sea custom of the buccaneers. Ashore these men are the most dextrous of cooks, often killing a cow especially so that her udder may provide them with a delicate joint, and serving it with pimento and other sauces to lend it piquant flavour. In a word, on dry land they are gourmands and glory in the fact. But at sea they are quite different; they can live there on victual of the roughest; and it is their conceit moreover to rate the office of cook as the lowest on shipboard. Either they make their prisoners do the work, or they carry a slave to dress their victual, or they are even content to swallow it raw sooner than grease their tarry fingers with either roasting-spit or boiler. On this captured carrack, then, as may be supposed, they pressed a couple of

Spaniards into the caboose (as the cookhouse is named at sea), and although these showed a stiff lip at first, and required some beating before they would serve, presently (after their devilish plot was concocted) they made the boils and the stews and the other sea dishes with docility, and, it must be confessed also, with appetising skill.

To the Yorkshireman Simpson must be credited the first hint that all was not as it should be. He and the Prince and the secretary were sitting on the taffrail one night between two of the great poop lanterns, and Rupert found occasion to comment that the voyage was drawing towards its conclusion very peacefully.

"'Appen," said Simpson, "and again, Captain, 'appen not. Them Spaniards makes out to be a sight too contented for my liking. They were as mad as hay about the way we shared up that treasure, an' they're far from liking t' idea of a happy week near owd Skin-the-Pike i' Tortuga. Now tha'llt not tell me they've forgotten; Spaniards is vengeful devils an' they niver forgets. And I tell tha' what, young feller, I'd be a deal more comfortable if they was up an' fighting with us."

"Pooh!" said Rupert lightly. "Spaniard-hating has grown to be a disease with you, Master Simpson. And, besides, we have taken our pre-

cautions. Look at the sentries. You can see the matches burning in their tubs from here."

"A Spaniard is as artful as a bagful of monkeys."

"And we fancy we are not without some strategy ourselves."

Simpson put a thumb on his chin. "Look here, now, young feller. I'd like t' 'ave tha' a bet on about it. I'll lay tha' an even pint potful o' silver pieces they try to have their knives into us before we've an anchor down in Tortuga Harbour."

"I'll take your wager with pleasure."

"Well," said Simpson, with a wink, "it's my brass," and there the talk ended.

But that night, when Master Laughan was officer of the watch and was patrolling the poop with due form and ceremony, the Yorkshireman came up and made an announcement of his plans in a cautious whisper. "I'm bahn to win yon bet, if cleverness will do it, and just to give Captain Rupert a suck in."—He winked, and patted the secretary's arm confidentially.—"I know these Spanish beggars more than a bit, an' it's my belief they wouldn't cower so quiet unless they were hatching mischief. Now say note to Rupert, lad, an' if tha' hears them cutting my throat forrard, call all the hands aft here and clear the decks for

bloody war. By gum, I'll win yon potful of pieces, choose 'ow."—With which he took himself off up the mizzen rigging, and was lost in the blackness of the night overhead.

It was clear that the man thought more of winning his paltry wager than of insuring the safety of his fellow-buccaneers, and the secretary smiled (but with tears in her eyes) as she thought of his crazy daring. But it seemed, when he came back afterwards to tell his tale, that Master Simpson had a shrewd notion of taking care of his own skin even when he so dangerously risked it. As has been said, the waist and the lower maindeck of the carrack was lit with battle lanthorns, but these only accentuated the darkness which wrapped the rest of her. The Yorkshireman, despite his size and weight, could climb with an ape's handiness. He made his way up to the mizzen topmast head, keeping always in the shadow of the spars and canvas; then like some uncouth crawling insect laid out along the stays, reaching first the main, and then the fore top mast head and finally slipping down the outer bolt-sprit stay, and crouched in the top of the mast there for a moment to recover breath. Below him, past the gammoning of the bolt-sprit, was the open-work of the ship's beak, upheld by her figure-head, and in the high wall of the for-

ward castle beyond, the lamplight gleamed out warmly through the two open gun-ports.

Quietly Master Simpson made his way down by the foot ropes, keeping most jealously to the shadows, and finally took up his post beneath one of these openings, settling himself comfortably so as to avoid unnecessary cramp. He would certainly have been killed a hundred times over if he had been caught there, but he stayed coolly on, listening to the chatter inside, hour after hour, and still hearing nothing of especial moment. It was terribly risky work. But as he explained afterwards he learned nothing of moment and wasn't inclined to give up hope of winning the bet till daylight came in and clearly routed him. He said he came from a country where they meant winning when they laid a wager, whatever it might cost to bring success.

But at last he heard what suited him, and what indeed saved every life in the after part of the ship, and returning laboriously by the way he had come, high over the rigging, he dropped down to the poop deck at the exact spot he had left it.

Master Laughan met him there, heavy-eyed for want of sleep, and soaked with the dew of night, and somewhat crabbedly inquired his news. The fellow had given her a good racking

of anxiety, and she did not wish to show it. But he laughed at her whimsically enough, and said his news would keep till breakfast time, and that for the present he was all yawns, and with that went below to his bed place. Which example the secretary in some annoyance followed forthwith.

Sentries challenged and bells clanged, watches were relieved and the routine of the night went on in its rigid way, and at last the timekeeper in charge of the glass cried seven o'clock and bade all hands rouse and bit. The toilettes of shipboard are hasty, as all when on the unstable sea sleep in their clothes to be ready for the sudden alarms which are so frequent. Indeed it has been neatly expressed, that seamen like dogs give one good shake, and are awake and dressed. And so when the timekeeper gave his cry and turned his glass, almost before the sand had begun to run the other way, all of the carrack's afterguard were turned out, and ready for their breakfasts.

There is no delicate napery at sea, and on this carrack, then, there was not so much as a salt vat to decorate the table. To each man was a wooden platter and a leathern cup, fitting into cavities cut in the board to keep them in place against the vessel's rolling, and the benches which served as seats were built into the solid fabric of the

deck. A savoury smell advertised the cook's coming, and the ship's company seated themselves on the benches before the table, and each drew his knife and laid it before him in readiness. Then the cook came into the great cabin bearing the mess kid in his arms, a lean, dark-faced man with a notable squint. The rude men at the table sniffed appreciatively, and the cook, setting the mess-kid on the deck, took out his great ladle and began filling the platters one by one as they were handed to him, and then when all were loaded, the fellow that had been appointed chaplain, rose to his feet, shut his eyes, and prepared to say the grace.

But at this point Simpson slipped round to the door of the cabin and cried a loud "Halt!" Many faces were turned upon him frowningly. They brooked ill, these buccaneers, any interference with their religious exercises. But Simpson was not the man to be quieted by a scowl.

"Captain," said he, "I'll have to ask tha' for yon half-pint o' silver pieces."

"It is yours, Master Simpson," said the Prince politely, "but I'd take it as courteous if you'd tell how you've earned it."

"Simple enough," said the Yorkshireman. "I just ask you to force the cook to sample his own wares."

"Why, we have a new cook to-day," said Rupert, staring at the Spaniard who held the mess-kid.

"True enough," said Simpson, "and afore turning cook, he was galley-slave, and afore that he practised as apothecary. It sticks in my mind that to-day he's mixed t' two businesses together and given us some apothecary's drugs in his cook's stew. If he hasn't, well, Captain, I may yet owe you the bet, but, if he has, I think you might pay up t' brass."

"Most certainly," said Rupert, "and I think the thing is easy proved, by watching the man eat a platter full of his own mess. "*Señor el Cocinero*," he said, dropping into the Spanish tongue, "by its savoury smell to-day your cooking has surpassed even its previous excellence."

The cook gave a doubtful little bow.

"But there exists some doubt as to the wholesomeness of the condiments wherewith you have flavoured it. The nearest vacant place at the table appears to be my own. May I beg of you to honour me by sitting in it and to show by your own appreciation how excellent is the mess you have brought for us."

The cook gripped tight on to his ladle and glared about him like a trapped wild animal. "I am not hungry," he said, "and besides I am a

Catholic and could not eat after the meat has been blessed by your chaplain. But the food is quite wholesome."

"I might point out to you that our honoured chaplain has not yet said the grace, nor will he till we know more about what is set before us."

"I will not eat," said the cook, and shivered violently. "I tell you I have no appetite. I am not hungry."

"My good man," said Rupert, "I stand in the position of king over this vessel, and my courteous invitation may be construed as a royal command. If you have no appetite, we must find you one." He signed to those of the buccaneers who sat nearest at the table, and these, who began to realise how matters lay, were nothing loath to give the cook some rough handling. He was forced into the chair at the head of the board, and those who held him began sawing at his ears with their knives. For long enough he withstood the torture, and sat there sullenly with the blood dripping on to his shoulders, and the buccaneers down the table, with the untouched platters still smoking before them, rested on their elbows and watched him. Prince Rupert, a man who was usually averse to these rude proceedings, looked on with a face that was hard and frowning, and except for the secretary, who felt herself pale as

she watched, there was not a trace of pity shown by anyone.

Stoically this monster of a cook held out, proving by his very stubbornness how complete was his guilt, but at length he began to recognise that the grim men who held him were not the sort that show undue leanings towards mercy. He had to choose between eating or being carved alive; and as a poisoner of long and loathly experience, the full horrors of his dish were well known to him. But the sharp, cold pain of the knives daunted him at last, and with a cry he stretched out his hand and began to scoop up the food in the platter before him, and to cram it into his mouth. He fed like a beast, the sooner to get it over, but those who watched him expressed neither disgust nor interest; remained, in fact, immovable; and his eyes roved over the board and glared at them horribly.

At last the platter was cleaned, and he sat back in his chair with a face lividly white and beaded with perspiration. No one spoke; all in the great cabin watched him with unwinking eyes. Presently he reached out his hand for a mug of water, and gulped it down. His teeth chattered against the lip of the drinking vessel; black rings grew round his eye-sockets.

He lay back again in the chair, gripping hard

upon the arms, and closing his eyes tightly. He knew the symptoms which should arrive, and in imagination endured half their torments before they actually came to him. When one remembered how he would have dealt out similar anguish to all the French and English of the ship's company, one could not deny that he was rightly served. But being human, one perforce had to pity as one watched.

But at last the pains began to grip him in real grinding earnest. He strained himself to that side and to this. He writhed like a wounded worm. He screamed aloud for someone in pity to kill him. But the mercy that he had dealt out to others was given him in full measure then. He was taken out through a door on to the main deck and laid there on a hatch, and the platters with the poisoned food were laid in a ring round him, and there he was left for his friends to deal with as they chose. And the exact manner of his wicked end, the present historian does not know.

On the poop above, the matches smoked in their tubs and the sentries stood by the loaded culverins which commanded the main deck. In the great cabin below Prince Rupert was paying to Master Simpson the amount of his wager. Simpson spat on the last coin for luck before he pocketed it.

"I'll give tha' a revenge," he said. "I'll bet tha' on onything that comes, nobbut just mention it."

"You're too shrewd for me," said Rupert laughing. "But I'd like to bet you another small wager that our Spaniards give us no more trouble after to-day."

"Tha'rt bahn to be shut o' t' lot of them, eh? There's an island close aboard, an' tha'st a mind to set 'em all ashore to laak about as they please? That's what we Bretheren of the Coast call marooning, an' it's just what they deserve. They were all i' t poisoning, an' they all deserve what t' druggist got, an' worse. An' when we're shut o' them, we'll just tak' their share o' t' brass an' squander it under owd Skin-the-Pike's nose in Tortuga along wi' t' rest."

"H'm," said Rupert, and appeared to consider. And then he sighed and said: "Well, Master Simpson, I suppose by the time money is carried across to The Hague that one piece will look so much like another that the King will not be able to distinguish between any of them. I am beginning to learn the lesson that it does not do to be too nice about small matters here in these seas of the New World."

"Not when there's Jack-Spaniards i' question," assented Simpson, and there the talk broke off,

and the Prince began making his dispositions for the capture of the carrack by the buccaneers.

As it chanced the powder room was aft, and those in the forward portion of the ship could neither use great guns or small arms, and when other pieces were drawn up on the poop, and men stood beside them with smoking lintstocks all ready to fire, the Spaniards had no stomach for a rush, but incontinently surrendered. The prestige of the buccaneers was so great amongst these people, that it saved even the semblance of a skirmish. Prince Rupert cried his orders, and with their own hands they hove the carrack to, hoisted out the two boats which lay on the booms, and tumbled over one another in their anxiety to be in them and off to try their fortune on the island which lay close under their lee.

As was natural, they had done their best to leave the ship ablaze behind them as a souvenir, but the buccaneers anticipated this, and went forward when the last of the wretches had gone, and had small trouble in extinguishing the flames. After which they let fly a shotted salvo from all the great guns after their common fashion, and once more trimmed sail, and got along their course.

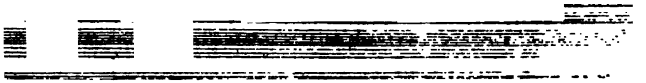
Again see the finger of fate. That very afternoon they came across a small pink out of Nom-

bre de Dios, loaded with rum. They gave her freedom for being engaged in so desirable a trade, only exacting some dozen puncheons of the liquor as a ransom, and when the sun went down upon the sea, there was the carrack in charge of Prince Rupert and Master Laughan, as being the only two sober souls in all her company. The rest of the tipsy dogs were making night shiver with their shoutings, and their shootings, and their singings, and all the other insanities of debauch. And if the Spaniards had been on board, the silly fellows would have got drunk just the same.

There is no trusting these buccaneers of the Spanish Main once they have got liquor to their hands, and that is the great reason why they are so unthrifty with their lives. Even a hard-witted fellow like Simpson the Yorkshireman could addle his brain on these occasions like the weakest of them.

Still with that happy-go-lucky navigation which is one of the features of the Carib Sea, the carrack sailed on, missing the reefs and shallows, coming to no harm in the gales, and in time she came to the harbour of Tortuga, for which she aimed. The buccaneers stood to the guns, firing shot from them in joyous salvos, and caring not one iota where the said shot flew. The carrack fluttered with banners and ancients, and the castle,

"THERE IS NO MISTAKING THE MANNER OF BUCCANEERS RETURNING WELL-LADEN."—*Page 275.*



and the squalid town by the water's edge, and the shipping at anchor quickly hoisted flags in welcome. There is no mistaking the manner of buccaneers returning well laden, and the harpies of Tortuga who live on such are not niggard in showing their joy that more ruffians have come in to be fleeced. Boats put out from the beach manned by vintners and tawdry hussies, each desirous of being first to catch a man, and on the castle of the Governor three trumpets and a drum made desirable music.

There was a fleet of three ships anchored apart from the others in the harbour, and Rupert's eye moistened as he looked upon them. They were the ships of His Majesty Charles II., which had come out to these seas with Rupert as Admiral to gain moneys for the upkeep of the Court at The Hague. They had been pawned to Monsieur D'Ogeron as a ransom for those distressed cavaliers that the accursed Cromwell had sold to the buccaneers. And here they were, out of their period of service, and ready once more to take on board their natural Admiral.

"Shall I round up the carrack amongst the fleet?" asked Master Laughan, who stood at the helm. "It will be a joyful moment for our people when they know who's returned to them."

"Let them keep their joy, then, for another

hour or so," said Rupert, "and do you carry on to an anchorage beyond. Seeing for how long a time we've been parted, it is only civil that first I should go up to the castle and pay my respects to Monsieur D'Ogeron. He and I have still an account to settle before I leave this desirable harbour."

So the carrack was brought to an anchor, with her courses roughly brailed and topsails lowered. But there was no attempt at stowing the canvas tidily, as the buccaneers were too keen to get ashore for their organised debauch, and, indeed, were already too drunk to venture aloft and out upon the foot-ropes. So all went off in shore-boats to the beach, and Rupert took the secretary's arm and turned to stroll up to the hill-top, where the castle crouched menacingly over the harbour. The women of the place tried hard with their loathly blandishments to detain them, but Prince Rupert was not the man to heed such tawdry Circes as these, though indeed he declined their invitation civilly, and even with a laughing word. So by degrees they walked up under the baking sunshine, and passed underneath the massive beam of the gateway, where the heads of Monsieur D'Ogeron's most recent enemies grilled under an outrageous sun.

The entrance yard was a mere rat-pit, a trap in

which the unfriendly could be shot down without a chance of retaliation. The only entrance door was in the upper story, and the ladder which gave access to this was hauled up with a chain and a pulley. However, after an exacting parley with a sentinel, Monsieur D'Ogeron consented to give audience to his visitors, and, once inside, extended to them his usual coarse amiability. "*Mon Prince*," he cried, "you have come back to claim your fleet within a week of the day on which it reverts to your command. If one may judge by your clothes, you've been seeing service. I trust that your outlay of courage has brought you a full financial return?"

"So—so," said Rupert.

"Well, try my brew of sangoree. You'll have found by now that this climate breeds a most delicious thirst."

"I thank you, but I will not drink."

The Governor laughed pleasantly. "You still stick to your Old-World courtesies, I see. Now, to me, one drink's as good as another, and I'd not refuse a man's invitation to swallow his sangoree, even if I were going to cut his throat next minute."

"I can believe it of you. You are a very nasty fellow, Monsieur."

The Governor of Tortuga shrugged his shoul-

ders and blew a long mouthful of tobacco smoke from his pipe. But he took no offence. "You didn't come up here to quarrel with me in words, I'll be bound, *mon Prince*. Neither did you call with the intention of putting your sword through me, as you know well by this how cunningly I can defend myself, and how unpleasant it is for callers to annoy me. Your Highness is a man of observation. You'll have noted the heads above the gateway?"

"They are all new since I was here last. Your Excellency is right. I did not come to exchange courtesies, civil or otherwise. I came for business: in a word, I am here to receive an account of my fleet's performance."

"Oh, they served me passing well, thanks to my own officers who were on board to keep tally and give directions. They caught five ships on the sea, and skimmed one a nice fat town. They brought no women back with them, having some foolish scruple, which even my officers could not get over—indeed, come to think of it, their obedience at times was none of the best—and, thirsty dogs that they were, they drank up all the wine they captured long before they sailed back into harbour here. But I'll not complain. They brought me a most appetising cargo of gold bars and plate."

"Which should have gone to the King."

Monsieur D'Ogeron reached out for the smouldering lintstock which stood on the table, and relit his pipe. "What, you still toy with that old fable of loyalty? Well, I've accounted myself no small judge of men, but it's a strange world, this. Why, by this, they'll have forgotten you in Europe."

"I flatter myself they'll keep me longer in memory."

The Governor shook his head and his pipe. "And your King will have written off your ships from his accounts as a speculation that's failed. Now, if I were your Highness, I'd not surprise him. I'd keep those ships. And I'd found myself a pretty little kingdom out here, and be absolute, and not go home to be servant again to an unstable Stuart. Why, Prince, you've got all the materials for a kingdom ready and waiting: the men are in your own ships; the women you can gather from any city of the Main you like to fetch them from, and there you are with the essentials complete. You choose your site, you build your town and fort, you catch your Indians, or you import Guinea blacks for slaves, and for occupation and revenue you raid the Spanish, when indeed you are not enjoying domestic joys at home. And, let me tell you,

that domestic joys out here are not things to be valued lightly. They grow upon a man."

"Sir," said Rupert, "have done. By now you might have known that such talk disgusts me. You appear to find enjoyment in living over that swinish village, which you miscall a town, on the beach yonder; but other men are built different, and, for myself, it would make me sick."

Monsieur D'Ogeron remained unruffled. "I see what you're at," he said with a wink. "You want to make me lose my temper and consent to fight you. Why should I? For honour? I haven't any. For chivalry? I've forgotten what it is. To please your whim? Why, there my own disinclination comes first. I haven't a particle of quarrel with you, *mon Prince*, and I really do not see how you can scratch one up. I've got the best of the bargain over the fleet, I've got the best of the bargain all through, and I quite see you've your sore. But I refuse to let you heal it by carving holes in me.—Here's to your speedy mending," said he, and swigged deeply at the sangoree.—"I do wish your Highness would drink. This abstinence is a slur on my hospitality."

Prince Rupert sat biting his nails in bitter anger. He knew well the dispositions of the

Governor of Tortuga's audience-room from previous humiliating experience. Behind one curtain stood a demi-bombarde, with a gunner and a lighted lintstock beside it, which could blow him to pieces at a word. Behind another curtain was another rogue, holding strings that governed those traps in the flooring which shot Monsieur D'Ogeron's unwelcome visitors into the dungeons beneath. And for aught the Prince knew, there might be other monkey pranks in readiness equally nasty. To be beaten by anyone was bad enough, but to be beaten by a creature of the low, dishonourable cunning of this Monsieur de Tortuga was past a gentleman's endurance. And so Rupert bit his nails through helpless rage.

The Governor lay back in his chair, watching the fumes from his tobacco pipe as they drifted towards the beams above, but withal keeping the tail of one eye warily upon the Prince. He was a man well-used to danger, and he plumed himself that he knew where danger lay, and by forethought was amply secured against it. But he had all his mind for the Prince, and not so much as a thought for the secretary, and indeed openly sneered at the poor creature for her slim figure and (what he was pleased to term) mincing, finicking ways. Indeed, if the bare truth be told, it was as much resentment at this contempt-

uous neglect (and to show the brute that she could be as dangerous as any man) that the poor secretary made the move that cut the Gordian knot of the situation. For by a sudden leap she stood behind Monsieur D'Ogeron's chair, pressing her poniard down upon his left shoulder.

She cried out that she would assuredly drive the weapon down into his heart if he moved, or if any of those who watched round the room so much as stirred, and of a truth would have murdered him there in sheer self-defence if he had disobeyed, though the mere thought of doing it turned her sick.

Rupert, with his quick appreciation of events, sat himself suddenly on the table (knowing the instability of the floor), and the frowns on his face changed to merry laughter. "Bravo, Stephen, lad," cried he. "Strike home if there's any discourtesy shown you. And now, Monsieur D'Ogeron, our diplomacy has come down to a plane where you may find yourself more amenable to reason."

The Governor smoked on unmoved. A curtain at one side of the room whisked across and showed a gunner, lighted match in hand, standing over the touch-hole of his piece. Another curtain moved away, and there was the man who

commanded the strings of the traps of the floor, and behind him a dozen uncombed fellows, each with pistols and hanger.

"We seem at a deadlock," said the Governor, with a wave of his pipe-stem.

"As for the lock, that's to be proved, Monsieur," said Master Laughan from behind him; "but as for being dead, why, there you will take precedence of all in this chamber when action begins." And in emphasis she twisted the poniard so that it might prick the Governor's shoulder through his clothing.

The Governor reached slowly for his sangoree and drank it with an air. "*Mon Prince*," he said, "the needs of your gracious sovereign at The Hague really begin to touch my conscience. If so lowly a creature as myself might help with a mite, it would give me vast pleasure to become his banker to the extent of—well, I am in an open mood to-day—say anything up to ten thousand pieces-of-eight."

"It is strange," said Rupert, "but our wishes seem to jump the same way. In fact you could not have made a more pleasing suggestion, Monsieur, except that you made one small tongue-slip in the figures. Surely the sum you had in mind was fifty thousand?"

"You are quite right. I meant to have said

twenty thousand, though it will leave my treasury dangerously bare."

"Fifty," said Rupert pleasantly.

"One cannot do the impossible. I have some very ingenious torture instruments in this castle, and some very patient tormentors who are skilled in their use. Between them they have brought about some marvellous changes of opinion, but even they could not make me say more than thirty thousand. If you doubt me, and carry this matter too far, perhaps presently you will be persuaded to go down into the torture chamber and test the perfection of my instruments for yourselves?"

"Ah, there," said Rupert, "I fear we must decline your invitation, Monsieur. Strange though it may seem in these seas of the New World, both Master Laughan and I have a certain niceness of nature which makes the sight of such things unpalatable. But I think, Stephen, that if you pressed your point a little further home, Monsieur D'Ogeron might still be brought to see things in our light."

Upon which the secretary in her nervousness thrust at the poniard so shrewdly, that the Governor with a bundle of oaths yelled out that he was beaten, and only prayed that the beastly dagger might be taken away from his shoulder.

"Young man," said he, "you had your iron far enough in for me to feel the chill. Do you know this is a very dangerous prank to play with one of my habit of life?"

There was still a difficulty remaining as to how the money was to be taken from the Castle treasury to the cabin of his flagship in the fleet where Rupert wished to see it stowed. The Prince distrusted Monsieur D'Ogeron implicitly, and (to own the bare truth) Monsieur D'Ogeron was indecently wary lest he should get himself too far into the Prince's hands. But in the end the pair of them left the castle arm-in-arm as though they had been the dearest of friends, and Master Laughan, as a dependent should, marched humbly behind them, though with a dagger very handy.

Chairs and a table were set upon the beach, and presently drink was brought (without which little business is done in the New World) and the pair of them toasted one another very handsomely. Even a creature like the Governor of Tortuga could not but admire the splendid parts of Rupert Palatine, and it seems that Rupert found points of excellence even in Monsieur D'Ogeron.

Meanwhile the money was brought down in sacks, and taken out in boats to the fleet, where a

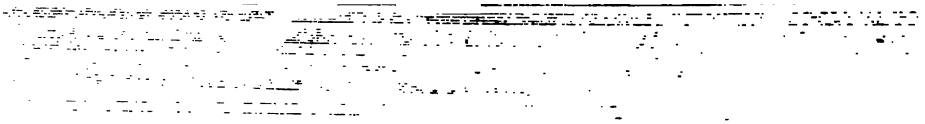
receipt was duly given, and the Governor saw his ill-got riches taken away from him for the service of the King without a frown or an angry word. He had the virtue of philosophy, this monarch of the buccaneers, and accepted the unavoidable like a man of sense. And moreover, as he said, the harvest of those seas was inexhaustible. The Spaniard, like the devil, was always with them, and it was an honest buccaneer's duty to get the better of both.

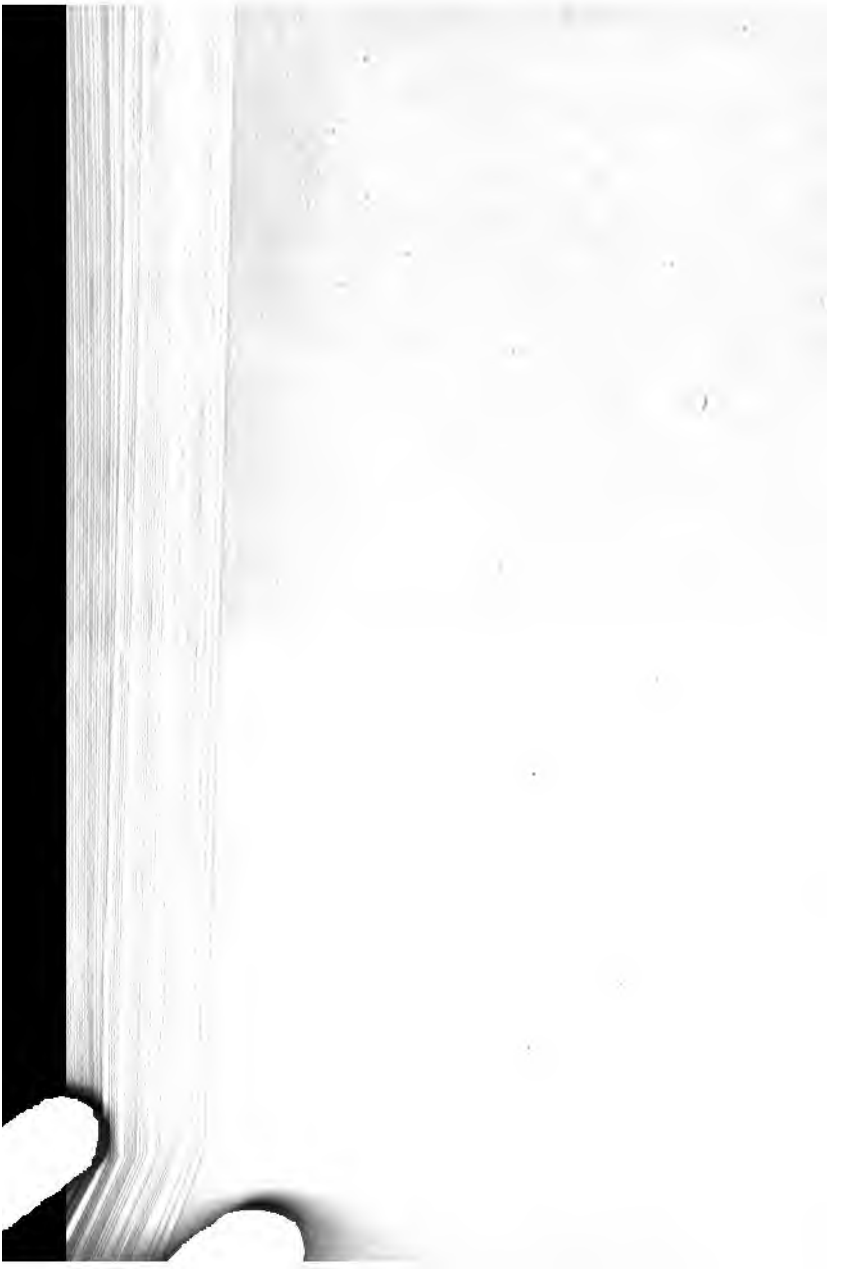
So the money was paid, and the parting was made, and Prince Rupert was rowed out across the still waters of the harbour to take his proper place once more as Admiral of the King's fleet. Master Laughan followed at his heels with a heart loaded with cheerful emotions. Alas, poor fond creature, little did she know that they were posting towards that lamentable quarrel which (soon after the horrid drowning of Prince Maurice) separated them eternally. Little did Rupert guess that he was so soon to be separated from one whose love and faithfulness towards him has been abundantly proved to all the world. Little did the secretary dream that she would lose as her patron that most noble, fearless and adorable man ever born since history began.

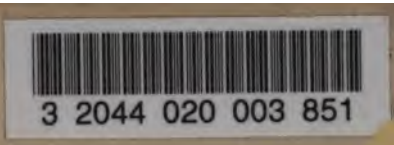
One weapon alone could the secretary have used that would have stilled the quarrel the mo-

ment it began; if she had declared her sex Rupert would have taken back the bitter word that drove her from his side. But she would have died sooner than make confession; and when she left her Prince, he was still ignorant that it was the maid Mary Laughan, and not Stephen the youth who had so lovingly and truly served him.

THE END.



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